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PART I

I

THE Herr Doktor moved away his chair from the large round table across half of which, amid the remains of a delicious dessert, a large-scale map of the surrounding French countryside had been spread out.

On the other half of the table had been pushed a confusion of delicate white-and-gold coffee-cups and almost empty liqueur-bottles —signs of the pleasant ending to the best dinner the five young Uhlan officers who were now gathered together in this French inn-parlour had eaten since 'The Day.'

Although the setting sun still threw a warm, lambent light on the high chestnut trees in the paved courtyard outside, the

low-walled room was already beginning to be filled with the pale golden shadows of an August night. A few moments ago the Herr Commandant had loudly called for a lamp, and Madame Blanc, owner of the Tournebride, had herself brought it in. Placed in the centre of the table the lamp illumined the flushed, merry young faces now bent over the large coloured map.

Alone the Herr Doktor sat apart from the bright circle of light, and, although he was himself smoking a pipe, the fumes of the other men's strong cigars seemed to stifle him.

Of only medium height, with the thoughtful, serious face which marks the thinker and worker; clad, too, in the plain, practical 'feld-grau' uniform of a German Red Cross surgeon, he was quite unlike his temporary comrades. And there was a further reason for this unlikeness. The Herr Doktor, Max Keller by name, was from Weimar; the young officers now round him were Prussians of the Junker class. They were quite civil to the Herr Doktor—in fact they were too civil—and their high spirits, their constant,

exultant boasts of all they meant to do in Paris—in Paris where they expected to be within a week, for it was now August 27, 1914—jarred on his tired, sensitive brain.

Behind his large tortoise-shell spectacles the Herr Doktor's eyes ached and smarted. He belonged to the generation which had been, even as children, put into spectacles. His present companions, more fortunate than he, had been born into the 'nature-eye' cycle of German oculistic research. Not one of them wore spectacles, and their exemption was one of the many reasons why he, though only thirty-four years of age, felt so much older, and so apart from them in every way.

Alone, of the six men gathered together to-night in that French inn-parlour, the Herr Doktor knew what war really means, and something—as yet he did not know much—of what it brings with it. He had been, if not exactly in, then what he secretly thought far worse, close to, the battle of Charleroi, and for the ten days which had followed that battle he had been plunged in all the stern horrors, and the gaspingly hurried,

unceasing work, of an improvised field hospital.

The fine abounding-with-life young officers, with whom a special circumstance had thrown him for some days, had so far escaped even a skirmish with the unfeared enemy; that they loudly lamented the fact, that they cursed, in all sincerity, the chance which had delayed their regiment till the first series of victories — Mons, St. Quentin, Charleroi—which had opened the wide road to Paris, was over, secretly irritated the Herr Doktor. *He* knew the limitless extent to which they were to be envied. And that knowledge made him hopelessly out of touch with them—out of touch as he could never be with the arrogant by-his-mother-spoilt lieutenant, his Highness Prince Egon von Witgenstein, whose arrival in the luxurious motor ambulance now standing just outside in the courtyard of the Tournebride alone accounted for the Herr Doktor's presence here. It was true that the boastful, childishly vain, fretful-tempered Prince Egon also talked unceasingly of the baser charms of Paris, but he, at any rate, had earned his

right to those same base charms by the three wounds from which he was now slowly recovering, thanks to the skill and care of the Weimar surgeon.

Sitting there, apart from the others, puffing steadily, silently, at his pipe, the Herr Doktor's mind, his dreamy, sensitive, imaginative mind, retraced all that had happened in the last two hours.

The taking possession of this charming little town of Valoise-sur-Marne had been carried through with most agreeable ease. The Mayor had blustered a bit, and had expressed his determination to write an account of all that had taken place to his Government. But when he had been told, in language of careful, cold, calculated brutality, that at the slightest disturbance or ill-behaviour of his townsmen or townswomen, he himself would be at once led out and shot, he had come to heel, and promised to do his best to preserve order.

There had been, however, a rather painful scene, one which the Herr Doktor disliked to remember, with the parish priest. The Curé of Valoise was an old, white-

haired man, and at first he had behaved with considerable dignity—with far more dignity, for instance, than the excitable Mayor. Also he had expressed himself as quite willing to be hostage for his flock's good behaviour.

The scene had occurred when the priest had been ordered off with the guard to the temporary prison he was to share with the Mayor. With what had seemed a most uncalled-for agitation, he had pleaded to be allowed to go and pay a last visit to three dying men. 'Surely you will accept my word of honour to return within one hour?' he had exclaimed, and then, in answer to a natural, if sharply uttered question—'No, I cannot—I will not—tell you where these dying men are! All I can say is that they are well within the limits of the town.' To accede to his request had been, of course, out of the question; and to the Herr Doktor's surprise, and indeed to his disgust, it was plain that the German Commandant's refusal to let the old priest have his way had gratified the Mayor—indeed the only smile any of them had seen on the French Republican official's

face was while this discussion, this urgent painful discussion, was going on.

After it was over, the two of them had been marched off to the Tournebride, where a large windowless fruit and tool house, standing isolated in the middle of Madame Blanc's kitchen garden, had been assigned to them as prison.

Everything else had gone quite smoothly, and both officers and men had found delightful quarters in the fine old inn which stood at the top of the hill, taking up all one side of the Grande Place. The Tournebride, so the Commandant informed the Herr Doktor, had been noted among gay Parisians, in the days of peace which now seemed so long ago, as a motoring luncheon and supper resort. Thus the conquerors of Valoise had found there the best of good wine, good food, and good beds.

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At last the Herr Doktor got up from his chair. Unnoticed by the others, he slipped out into the cooler air outside. The

courtyard, shaded by high horse chestnut trees, was now crowded with good-humoured German cavalry-men waiting, patiently enough, for the savoury meal which Madame Blanc and her two anxious-faced young daughters were engaged in preparing for them.

As the Herr Doktor walked quickly over to the other side of the quadrangle, the soldiers respectfully made way for him, and he stood, for a few moments unnoticed, on the threshold of the big kitchen of the Tournebride. To eyes already war-worn it was a pleasant sight.

To and fro in her low, arch-roofed, spacious domain, the landlady came and went, busily intent on her considerable task of feeding over a hundred men. There were huge copper cauldrons on the steel top of the *fourneau*, and Madame Blanc herself constantly stirred and inspected their contents. But when she became suddenly aware of the German doctor's presence at the kitchen door, she stayed her labours and came towards him.

Silently she waited, a stern look of heavy-

hearted endurance on her face, for him to speak; and at last, in a French which was somewhat halting, he put the question he had come to ask, and on the answer to which, as he well knew, depended a good deal of the future comfort of his illustrious, tiresome patient, Prince Egon von Witgenstein. Was there a hospital in Valoise?

'There is no hospital in Valoise.' Madame Blanc's voice was very, very cold. But after a moment's pause she added: 'The nuns were chased away four years ago, and the Government have not yet decided what to do with their convent.'

As there came a look of disappointment on his mild face she went on, as if the words were being dragged from her reluctant lips: 'But M. le Médecin will find a Red Cross barge on the river.'

Madame Blanc's powerful, swarthy face was set and grim; she did not look as if she had ever smiled, or if she had, would ever smile again. Yet the man now standing opposite to her remembered that, when he had first arrived with his patient, she had shown a certain maternal interest in the

inmate of the Red Cross motor ambulance which now stood in a corner of her large paved courtyard, also that within a few minutes of the peaceful assault of her inn she had herself cooked for the wounded officer a delicate little meal.

The Herr Doktor smiled conciliatingly, but she gave him no answering smile. Her heart was still too full of wrath, of surprise, of agonised, impotent rage, at the happenings of the last two hours.

A troop of the abhorred, dreaded Uhlans had suddenly appeared, clattering along the wide Route Nationale which followed the right bank of the river Marne. Without drawing rein they had ridden up the steep, central street of Valoise, and then they had turned straight into the courtyard of the Tournebride.

Madame Blanc had been amazed at the extent and particularity of the Prussians' knowledge of the town, and of her inn. Not only had they greeted her, with a strange mixture of joviality and sternness, by name, but the golden-haired, pink-cheeked commanding officer had actually alluded to

the *spécialité* of the Tournelle-ride—a certain chicken-liver omelette which Parisians motored out to enjoy on all fine Sundays from each May to each October! And then, perhaps because she had tacitly refused to fall in with his pleasant humour, the young Uhlan officer, after his first roughly jovial words, had suddenly threatened her with mysterious and terrible penalties if she disobeyed, in any one particular, his own and his comrades' confusing orders.

Yes, they had only arrived two hours ago, and yet already Madame Blanc hated these arrogant Uhlan officers with all the strength of her powerful, secretive French nature. Quite willingly, had she thought it would have served the slightest good purpose, would she have put a good dose of poison in the excellent soup they, in the company of the man now talking to her, had just eaten.

She also hated, but in an infinitely lesser degree, their men — those big, bearded, splendidly equipped soldiers clad in the grey-green cloth which her strong common sense had at once told her must be so far

more serviceable, because blending with nature's colouring, than the bright blue and red uniforms of her own countrymen. But for the wounded youth, who now lay straight and still in the huge grey motor-car, bearing on its side a painted Red Cross which she could almost touch from where she stood at her low kitchen door, she felt a thrill of motherly pity and concern. . . .

'A Red Cross barge on the river?' repeated the Herr Doktor doubtfully.

For a man who had never been in France before, and who had been taught French by a German who, in his turn, had never been in France save during the brief, glorious-and-ever-victorious-campaign of 1870, the Herr Doktor spoke very fair French. But while he spoke, and even more while he listened to Madame Blanc's quick, short utterances, he blamed himself severely for having wasted so much time on the English language. English was now never likely to be of much use to him, save perhaps during the coming Occupation of London. If only he had spent as much time and trouble over French as he had done over English,

not only would it have been useful here and now, but it would have been invaluable a little later on—when he took up his quarters, as he hoped to do within the next two or three weeks, at the Pasteur Institute in Paris.

'Yes,' said Madame Blanc, with a touch of irritation in her even, vibrating voice, 'as I have just had the honour of explaining to M. le Médecin, there is a Red Cross barge on our river. Mademoiselle Rouannès is there all day, from six in the morning till nine o'clock each night.'

Is Mademoiselle' — he had not really caught the curious name, 'is she' — he hesitated for the right phrase— 'is she a Sister of Compassion?'

'I have just told M. le Médecin that all our good sisters were chased away by the Government four years ago. Mademoiselle Rouannès is our doctor's daughter.'

And then, as the man standing before her uttered a quick guttural exclamation of relief, she added sharply, 'You cannot see Doctor Rouannès, for he is very ill—some say he is dying.' As again she saw a look of disappointment overcast his face, she added—

'But his daughter is a very serious demoiselle. The wounded have every confidence in Mademoiselle Rouannès.'

'Thank you, Madame, I will now the barge of the Red Cross go and seek,' he said, and bowed courteously.

'It is just at the bottom of the hill, this side of the lock. But wait a minute—I can show you the exact place from the *abreuvoir*.'

She stepped across the threshold of her kitchen, and walked, with a good deal of simple dignity, through the groups of tall soldiers who stood at ease, contentedly smoking their big pipes under the chestnut-leaves canopy of her courtyard. They made way for her pleasantly enough—some even smiled the foolish, fond smile of the big man-child, for she reminded more than one of these burly giants of his own mother. But Madame Blanc gave no answering smile, as, gazing straight before her, she hurried on towards the high gilt gates of her domain—a domain which till a hundred years ago, and for more than a hundred years before that, had kennelled royal staghounds, and housed their huntsmen.

The Herr Doktor stopped for a moment to speak to a non-commissioned officer, a good fellow who came from his own town of Weimar. 'Keep an eye on the motor ambulance,' he muttered. 'You might, in fact, go and ask His Highness if he requires anything further just now. Tell him I have gone out to look for quiet quarters. It would be impossible to have the Prince here to-night; the house won't settle down for a long time.'

The other grinned, broadly. 'These are comfortable, greatly-to-be-commended quarters, nevertheless, Herr Doktor.' And the Herr Doktor, nodding, hastened after his guide.

He followed her through the wrought-iron gilt gates, now wreathed with white jessamine and orange-coloured trumpet flowers, and so to the great open space which formed the apex, not only of the hill, but of the little town, of Valoise-sur-Marne.

A moment later they stood before the oval *abreuvoir*, a stone-rimmed pool at which the timid does sometimes came, even now, to quench their thirst at night.

For a few moments Madame Blanc gazed dumbly over the dear familiar scene, and the German surgeon respected her silence.

Lit by the afterglow of the setting August sun, the little town of Valoise lay spread before them . . . a picturesque, gaily charming cluster of white, grey, and red roof-trees, full of the peaceful stateliness of aspect which is a distinguishing mark of so many of the old villages and towns set amid chestnut groves, and on river banks, within easy reach of Paris.

From the days of Henri IV, the Kings of France had possessed a favourite hunting lodge on the edge of the wooded uplands stretching behind the town, and though the Pavillon du Roi had been destroyed during the Revolution, the avenue of high forest trees which had once bounded the royal demesne still remained, faithful witness to a vanished glory, while a fragmentary survival of what had been a grandiose and splendid whole remained in the stone *abreuvoir*.

And yet, as following his companion's example, the Herr Doktor gazed over what was in truth a singularly pleasing and soothing

scene, a sense of chill, even of discomfort, crept over his kindly heart.

Valoise looked, on this fine summer evening, as might look a place stricken with the plague. Some melancholy-looking dogs had been shut out of doors: they, and a few cats who leapt furtively out of their way, seemed the only living things in the town.

Why were the French civilian population so sullen? The great, generous-hearted, all-conquering German army did not war on children and women—not, that is, so long as these women and children behaved in a reasonable, civilised manner.

The Herr Doktor had already heard rumours of certain painful, frightening things which had had to be done, and which were still being done, in Belgium. But the French were a more civilised people than the Belgians—or so the cultured Max Keller had persuaded himself to believe. Further, the Germans had no real quarrel with the French, the foolish, impulsive, chivalrous French, who had allowed themselves to be dragged into a quarrel with which they had no concern, in

order to support barbarous Russia and lawless, savage Servia !

Standing by the side of the sensible, clean housewife who had just served him so admirably cooked a meal, the Herr Doktor reflected complacently that very soon some sort of peace would be signed in Paris, after which the French and Germans, friends as they had never been before, would join together to break the might of the now decadent, nerveless, and treacherous English.

He would have liked to have expressed some of this comfortable, so-friendly-to-the-French feeling to the woman who now stood, her hands clenched together, as if absorbed in painful, far-away thoughts by his side. But he knew that his French was too halting to convey these cultured-and-so-humane and German sentiments. He started slightly when Madame Blanc suddenly turned to him with the words, 'It is getting rather too dark to see the place clearly from here, but if M. le Médecin will go straight down to the river, and across the wall, he will see the Red Cross barge just in front of him.'

Before he had time to utter the words

aloud, 'Very truly, Madame, do I thank you,' she had left his side, and was half-way across the Grande Place, on her way towards the Tournebride.

Feeling a little discomfited by her abrupt departure, the Herr Doktor stepped forward, and started walking briskly down the hill.

How pleasant it was to be alone—alone with his own exciting and, yes, glorious thoughts! The absence of solitude had been the thing which had tried Max Keller the most in this amazing-and-ever-victorious campaign. During the last three days he had found the conversation of Prince Egon's brother officers particularly wearing, as also very, very—he hardly knew what phrase to use even in his inmost mind, but at last he found it—very-lacking-in-culture-and-seriousness.

The Paris of which these Junkers talked incessantly was not the Paris to which he, the Herr Doktor, looked forward so eagerly, the Paris, for instance, of the Pasteur Institute, and of the Salpétrière. The Paris of these young officers—and he regretted indeed that it was so—was the Paris which, as every good

German knew, so aroused the anger and contempt of God as to cause France to be once more crushed and humiliated to the dust. Of this Paris there existed a very fair imitation in what had been euphemistically called 'the night life of Berlin,' but Berlin, to the Herr Doktor at any rate, did not stand for his Fatherland as Paris stands for France.

So musing, so thankful for even a few moments of peace and solitude, the mildest of the conquerors of Valoise reached the bottom of the hill.

Across the paved Route Nationale was an avenue, or mall, of lime trees which formed a green wall between the road and the river. He crossed the street as he had been directed to do, and then, when actually under the dense arch formed by interlacing branches of green leaves, he uttered an exclamation of relief; for there before him, close to the entrance of the lock, and only to be reached by a narrow stone jetty, lay on the placid, slow-moving waters of the river a broad, white barge, on the side of which was painted a large Red Cross. The small, square, white

curtained windows just above the dimpling water line were all open, and, set amidships, was a round porthole, on whose edge stood a pot of brilliant scarlet geraniums.

On the deck of the barge stood a woman. She wore the loose, unbecoming white overall which forms the only uniform of a French Red Cross nurse, and there was a red cross on her breast. From where he stood the German surgeon could see that she was young, straight, and lithe. The gleams of the sun, which was now resting, like a huge scarlet ball, on the horizon, lit up her fair hair, which was massed, in the French way, above her forehead. He saw her in profile, for she seemed to be gazing, through the waning light, down the river beyond the lock.

With a queer thrill at the heart the Herr Doktor told himself that so might Wagner have visioned his Elsa in war-time. Since the Herr Doktor had left Weimar, he had not seen a so awakening-to-the-better-feelings and pleasant-to-the-senses-of-man sight as was this French golden-haired girl.

Taking off his cap—for Max Keller was aware that Frenchwomen are curiously

punctilious, and he did not wish her to suppose that a cultured German could be lacking in even unnecessary courtesy—he started walking along the narrow stone jetty.

And then, when at last he stood just opposite to the barge, and as suddenly the Red Cross nurse became aware of his presence, he saw a dreadful look of aversion and dread flash into her face and she turned and hastened away, down what he concluded must be a stairway leading to the interior of the barge.

For what seemed to him a considerable time the Herr Doktor stared at the now empty deck with a feeling of sharp exasperation and disappointment.

In the little town where had come that awful rush of wounded after the battle of Charleroi he had already been in contact with the French Red Cross. There had been several Frenchwomen—two countesses, so he had been told, and a duchess—middle-aged ladies who had treated him with suave, if distant, courtesy, and who had always deferred, most politely and sensibly, to his professional knowledge. In he same hastily improvised Feld-Lazaret there had also been

three English nurses; them he had naturally disliked, the more so that they had a sharp, short way with them, and always seemed to disapprove of his methods—methods which, being German, were of course in every way superior-and-more-truly-scientific than anything likely to issue from the English Army Medical Service.

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For some time, perhaps for as long as five minutes, the Herr Doktor stood on the stone jetty. He did not like to step down upon the barge and at once take possession of it, as it was his undoubted right, almost his duty, to do. Also, though in no way a coward, his nerve had been shaken by the terrible things he had seen, and by the long fatiguing hours of desperately hard work he had lately gone through. Horrible stories were whispered as to what the French were capable of doing to an unarmed enemy. The inside of this big roomy barge might contain youths and old men armed with knives and scythes. . . . Perhaps his wisest course would

be to go up the hill again, and, together with his patient, return with an armed escort who would deal in summary fashion with any evil-intentioned inmates of the Red Cross barge.

While he was thus hesitating, there suddenly floated towards him the stifled sounds of hurried whisperings. They were followed, a moment later, by the lady of the barge herself. But her fair hair was now almost entirely hidden by the severe, unbecoming head-dress of a French Red Cross nurse; and the hard white coif and flowing veil obscured the free, graceful, rather haughty poise of her head.

As at last she faced him squarely, he became painfully aware of the mingled terror and anger which made her face turn from white to red, and filled her blue eyes with a dreadful look of haunting fear.

The Herr Doktor was well read in the great Romantics of the world, and quite involuntarily he thought of Rebecca and a certain scene in 'Ivanhoe.'

Just behind the tall, slender figure, forming at once a guard and an escort to

the Red Cross nurse, came a short, sturdy-looking, elderly woman, clad in a dark blue-and-white check gown, and an old man, dressed in a shabby black suit.

Stepping forward alone, Mademoiselle Rouannès stood close to the plank which connected the stone jetty with the barge, and while the Herr Doktor was trying to compose the right form of words, at once firm and conciliatory, with which to address her, she suddenly spoke.

'How many wounded have you?' she asked, in a low, clear voice. 'I must tell you, Monsieur, that we have not room for many here, for we already have eighteen.' As he remained silent, she went on, a little breathlessly, and he saw that her under-lip was quivering, 'We have one empty cabin, but it is not very large; it will not hold more than six.'

And then at last the Herr Doktor found the French words he wanted with which to answer and to reassure her.

'I have but one wounded man, gracious demoiselle. It is his Highness Prince Egon von Witgenstein. You may of him have heard?'

She shook her head with a touch of scorn, and he saw with relief that, for some difficult-to-understand reason, she was now no longer as afraid of him as she had been.

'Is he very badly wounded?' she asked in the clear, grave voice which already kindled his heart.

'He has very badly wounded been, but now is on the way to recovery,' said the Herr Doktor decidedly. He felt more at ease with this serious, beautiful maiden now that they were discussing his patient. 'What the Prince requires is rest and care and quiet. There could not a better place for him than your Red Cross barge be. Perhaps will you allow me with your doctor the arrangements to discuss?' His eyes sought uncertainly the man in the background, the thin, frightened-looking old man dressed in seedy black. Could this be a French physician?

Even while speaking he had edged cauticusly down the plank footway. 'Pardon me, Mademoiselle—May I advance?' he asked politely.

And she bent her head.

A moment later he was standing close to her, gazing with an earnest, conciliating gaze into her sad blue eyes. She looked pale and worn, but it was only the transitory pallor and fatigue of youth unaccustomed to the strain of anxiety, and the wear of work and sorrow.

'We have no doctor,' she said and, sighing, looked away. 'My father, who is a doctor, would be here were it not that'—her voice broke suddenly—'he was terribly wounded—wounded when himself tending the wounded!'

'Sorry I am to hear that!' exclaimed the Herr Doktor, and he was indeed sorry. 'But who attends the eighteen men you tell me you have on this barge?'

'*I* attend them,' she said, and a little more colour came into her face. 'I and my two friends whom you see here. Most of them were only slightly wounded, but we have three serious cases.'

'Perhaps you will allow me to visit them, and see how helpful I can be to your three serious cases?' He spoke deferentially, and the rigid lines in which her soft mouth was set relaxed.

'I thank you,' she said quietly, 'but I fear they are beyond your help.'

She turned, and preceded him down the narrow, shaftlike stairway. It terminated in a square passage place, lighted by a porthole, on the ledge of which stood the pot of geraniums the Herr Doktor had noticed when standing under the lime tree mall.

Opening a narrow door to her right, the French girl led him into a large, low, cabin-room which looked the larger and the barer because here too everything was white—the walls, the floor, the curtains drawn across each small square window, and even the coverlets of the pallet beds in which lay the eighteen wounded men.

And as he followed the young Red Cross nurse from bed to bed, as he divined what had once been the condition of most of the young soldiers there, and saw what it was now, the Herr Doktor paid his guide a secret, involuntary tribute of respect. She had not exaggerated, as the amateur nurse so often does, the state of three of her patients. The German surgeon saw with concern that two

out of the three were indeed beyond his help—they were even now dying.

'The lad over there might by skilled attention benefit. Has no doctor him seen?' he asked abruptly. He had not raised his voice, but his companion's hand shot out; she touched his arm.

'Don't speak so loudly,' she whispered, 'or he will hear you. The poor fellow does not know how ill he is!'

The Herr Doktor felt at once a little irritated and a little moved. Apparently all Frenchwomen were like that! The only time he had had the slightest unpleasantness with one of those French noblewomen at the Feld-Lazaret was when he had suddenly spoken, in front of a certain wounded boy, of the fact that he could not last many hours. But whereas he had felt very much annoyed, annoyed and angry, with the rebuke uttered so sharply by the Red Cross nurse on that former occasion, this time irritation was merged in indulgent amusement. This fair-haired, blue-eyed girl—this French Elsa—was after all only a novice, though a most capable, conscientious, hard-working novice!

It was good to know that very soon—perhaps as soon as another fortnight or three weeks—the awful cloud of war would be lifted off beautiful, prosperous, frivolous France. She would be conquered for her own good, and would of course have to pay in treasure, as she was now paying in lives, heavily, for her lesson. But after the coming peace France would become, not only a peaceful, but what she had never before been, an affectionate neighbour to wise, masculine, masterful Germany. Already the Herr Doktor found himself celebrating the peace with France by planning a return visit to this charming, peaceful, little town of Valoise-sur-Marne.

It was a good thing for him as well as for Jeanne Rouannès that, while she busied herself with the lighting of a hand lamp, she had no clue to his exultant, disconnected thoughts.

More and more as she accompanied him to each bedside, and as he listened to her low, harmonious voice explaining the various cases of those poor human wrecks—flotsam and jetsam of cruel war—for whom she

showed such pitiful concern, he felt the surprise he had not thought to feel, and the admiration he was ready to encourage, grow and grow. Glad indeed was the Herr Doktor to know that there were certain things which he could do to ease that last, losing conflict with death now being waged by two of the Frenchmen lying there before him. Impulsively he turned to her—Ah! if only he could express himself adequately in her difficult, attractive language!

And then there came to him a sudden inspiration.

'Do you speak English?' he asked in the language which, however much he hated it in theory, came yet so far more easily to his tongue than did that of France.

In a surprised tone the Red Cross nurse answered, in the same uncouth tongue, with the one word, 'Yes.'

And then, as she listened to his now quick, clear, intelligent explanation of what might at least bring the ease bred of oblivion to her dying patients, the look of anxious, almost agonised, strain faded from her blue eyes and delicately chiselled face; while as

for the Herr Doktor, he felt as though they two had suddenly glided into a harbour of that happy, innocent No Man's Land where the gigantic absurdities, the incredible inhumanities of war had never been, and never could take place.

Only an hour ago Max Keller would have fiercely denied that anything connected with England or with the English could be anything but hateful to him—yet how thankful was he now for that sudden inspiration! It reversed the rôles, gave him the advantage, and that most agreeably, of this Red Cross nurse, for though he did not speak English nearly as correctly as did Mademoiselle Rouannès, he expressed himself more fluently.

'Have you ever to England been?' he ventured at last.

She shook her head. 'No, but for some time I had an English lady for a governess. And now—now I love England!' She looked at him quite straight as she spoke, and he felt a sudden sense of unease. It was as if the tide had turned. They were drifting away from that pleasant harbour of No Man's Land. . . .

When they had finished their round, she led him through the little square passage room into the other and smaller half of the hold. This cabin was empty, save for a row of pallet beds. 'Will this be suitable for your wounded officer?' she asked him gently.

'Yes, very well it will do,' he said hastily. 'And now with your permission, gracious miss, my two orderlies I will send to prepare for the Prince.'

'Cannot my servants make what preparation is needed?' she asked, and there was a tremor of fear and of revolt in her voice.

'I fear not. First these beds must moved out be. But do not be afraid—they will great care take not in any way to trouble you. Indeed, you will not be here, it must now be the time when you away go.' And as she looked at him in surprise, he added awkwardly, 'The hostess of the Tournebride—I think Madame Blanc her name is—told me that you the barge at nine o'clock always left.'

'When there are soldiers dying,' she said in a low voice, 'I arrange to stay here all night'; and then, looking at him pleadingly,

she added, 'Could you wait just one little hour before bringing your patient to the barge?'

Reluctantly he shook his head. 'I must as soon as possible the Prince here bring. It is bad for him in a courtyard full of noisy men to be.'

But she went on, making an evident effort to speak calmly, conciliatingly. 'Our curé is on his way to administer these poor dying. I cannot think why he has delayed so long—I sent for him at five o'clock——'

'But—but'—and now it was the Herr Doktor's turn to hesitate—'your curé cannot come here to-night, gracious miss—at least the old priest who lives in the house next the church cannot do so. He has been taken as a hostage for the good behaviour of the population of this town. Temporarily is he prisoner. A sad necessity of war such things are.' He looked at her deprecatingly—for the first time it occurred to him that the Herr Commandant might have contented himself with locking up the truculent mayor, and letting the old priest alone.

He saw her wince, he saw the colour

rush into her face. 'But surely Monsieur le Curé will be allowed to administer the last Sacraments to dying soldiers!' she exclaimed.

He shook his head solemnly. It was indeed unfortunate for him that war, and the cruel, grotesque inhumanities of war, were invading the stretch of neutral country on which he and this—this so refined and *zierliches Madchen* had glided so pleasantly but a short half-hour ago. Full of very real concern he nerved himself to reject the personal appeal he felt sure she was about to make to him. But Mademoiselle Rouannès did nothing of the kind. Instead she turned, and looking up the shaft of the stairway, called out sharply 'Jacob!' and then 'Thérèse!'

The thin man and the stout woman both came hurrying down, and at once she spoke to them in quiet, dry, urgent tones. 'The Prussian doctor of the Red Cross is going to bring a wounded Prussian officer on to the barge. He will occupy the smaller cabin. Two orderlies are coming to help you to prepare the cabin; and you, Jacob, will

have to show the Prussians how the crane is worked.'

The Herr Doktor, himself much ruffled by hearing himself described as a Prussian, saw a look of sullen ill-temper come over Jacob's face. But Mademoiselle Rouannès put out her hand and laid it on the old fellow's shoulder. 'My good friend,' she said, and her voice quivered for the first time, 'pray do what I ask of you without discussion. And you, Thérèse, I must ask to go home and tell my father that I am taking the watch here to-night.'

Jacob was the first to respond to the appeal. He looked fiercely at the German Red Cross surgeon. 'At your orders, M'sieur,' he said gruffly. As for the woman, she turned away with a sullen 'Bien, Mademoiselle,' and started walking up the ladder-like stairway.

The Red Cross nurse bowed distantly. 'Bon soir, Monsieur,' she said coldly.

The Herr Doktor also bowed stiffly. It was disconcerting, even strange, to find himself once more in enemy country.

She slipped through the narrow door of

the larger ward, and he heard her draw the bolt.

Again he felt irritated, and surprised as he had been surprised at seeing that strange look of aversion and horror flash into her face when her eyes had first rested on him. . . .

True, she was young, divinely compassionate, and very delightful to the eye, but she evidently misunderstood the situation! It was he, Herr Doktor Max Keller, who was now in command of the Red Cross barge, and that by the rules of the International Red Cross Society. He might, however, so far humour her as not to bring his orderlies to-night on board what had been her Red Cross barge. He had noticed with sincere annoyance that his men—who, by the way, were Prussians—were rough, not to say brutal, in their manner to those French people with whom they were perforce brought into contact.

So after he had made the old Frenchman understand what he wanted done, he asked him, in his halting French, 'Is there an hotel close by where I can sleep?'

'There's a kind of cabaret yonder'— and then, as if rather ashamed of his ungraciousness, the man added, 'I will come and show Monsieur le Médecin where it is.'

Together they climbed up on to the deck of the barge, and there the Herr Doktor stopped a moment, and looking round about him, drew a deep, long breath. The falling of the shade of night was singularly beautiful on this quiet stretch of slow-moving waters. Across the river a line of poplars looked like a row of ghostly, giant sentinels. . . .

The two men, the Frenchman in front, the German behind, stepped off the barge on to the narrow stone jetty, and then they walked for a few yards in darkness along the leafy mall. None of the street lamps had been lit on this, the evening of the most tragic day in the life of Valoise, but dim lights twinkled in the house across the roadway to which old Jacob now led his enemy.

'M'sieur will find this place quite clean,' he observed, vigorously pulling the bell of a narrow door. There was a long delay— then a young woman, opening her door a few inches, looked timorously out at them.

But Jacob now took everything on himself. With what seemed to his companion an unnecessary torrent of words, he explained that 'Monsieur' was a doctor of the Red Cross, who had come to look after the wounded on the Red Cross barge, and that therefore a room must at once be prepared for him. The woman's face cleared, she opened her narrow door widely, and led the way up to a large, clean bedroom on the first floor, of which the windows overlooked the mall, the river, and—the barge.

As a few moments later they left the house the Herr Doktor could not help feeling grateful to old Jacob. Jacob? Why 'twas almost a German name!

4

Half an hour later the great grey ambulance, drawn up close to the gates of the Tournebride, was ready to start down the hill, and the Herr Doktor waited impatiently while the five hale and whole officers bade their wounded comrade a hearty, lengthy, and jovial good-night.

They were all *übermütig*—bubbling over with wild spirits—and still talking of their Mecca—Paris—now only some thirty miles away. Any hour might come the longed-for order to advance thither!

The Herr Doktor's illustrious patient seemed the most eager of them all. But he hoped the order to advance would be delayed till he himself were well enough to be in time for the solemn entry into the conquered city—that entry through the Arc de Triomphe which was to be a more superb replica of that which had taken place in 1871. Some days must surely elapse before that glorious pageant could take place, although everything was ready for it—in Luxemburg. In Luxemburg, so Prince Egon now told his comrades—for he alone among them was in touch with the Court—the Kaiser was waiting impatiently for the glad news that Paris had fallen or surrendered. There too, even now, the Imperial Master of the Horse had everything prepared—the state chargers, even, had been brought from Potsdam. . . .

At last the Herr Doktor went up to the

youthful commanding officer. 'A word with you in private,' he said hurriedly, and the other allowed himself to be drawn aside. He was curious to know what the Herr Doktor could possibly have to say, 'in private.'

'I know well your humane sentiments towards the unfortunate population of this conquered country'—the words came quickly, almost breathlessly—'and your good heart, Herr Commandant, will perhaps remember the curious request made to you by the old French priest when taken hostage. I have discovered that what he said was true—that there are indeed three wounded soldiers dying on the Red Cross barge where I am about to take Prince Egon. Two of the men will not outlast the night, and the Red Cross Sister, a French lady of distinction, is most anxious they should receive religious consolation. That being so I thought I might promise her that this pious wish should be gratified. With your permission the priest can go in the ambulance, and I myself will bring him back within an hour or so!'

The Herr Commandant looked at the

Herr Doktor doubtfully. He did, it was true, hold the unusual theory that benignant justice, rather than 'frightfulness,' was the right way to deal with a conquered population. He remembered, too, that, unlike his four lieutenants, his own instinct had been to believe the Curé of Valoise when the old man had pleaded that he might be allowed to attend 'trois mourants,' and that, though it had seemed almost impossible that there could be three dying people desiring priestly ministration in this little town, the more so that, as all the world knew, France was now an utterly godless country.

Still he waited a few moments before answering. It was not proper that the Herr Doktor should take too much upon himself. But his mind was already made up, and at last he took a large key out of one of his pockets, and handed it to the Herr Doktor. 'You must be personally responsible for the hostage's safe return!' He laughed rather huskily. 'The responsibility is not great, Herr Doktor, or perhaps I would not put it upon you! That old man could not hobble away very far. The Mayor—ah, that

is another matter! He is what they call here *un fort gaillard.*' He uttered the three French words without any accent, and the other envied him.

The Herr Doktor hastened across the courtyard and found the arch in the wall which he knew led through into Madame Blanc's well-stocked kitchen garden. In the centre of the large open space there rose, in the moonlit darkness, the square building lit only by a skylight, which had been chosen as making an ideal prison for the two hostages. Putting the key the Herr Commandant had handed him in the door, he turned it, and walked into the sweet-smelling fruit-room of the old inn.

There a curious sight met his eyes. The two Frenchmen, companions in misfortune though they were, had placed themselves as far the one from the other as was possible. The priest sat on his truckle bed, reading his breviary by the light of a candle, while the Mayor of Valoise, also sitting on his bed—for the Tournebride had naturally proved very short of the chairs required for the accommodation of so many hosts—was busily

writing what he intended to be the official account of his amazing and disagreeable adventures.

As the door opened the Mayor leapt to his feet, and a look of apprehension shot over his dark, southern-looking face. The priest looked up, but remained seated, and went on reading his prayer-book with an air of ostentatious indifference.

The Herr Doktor walked across to the old man. 'Will you please at once come?' he said haltingly. 'Permission for you I have obtained to attend the French wounded on the Red Cross barge.'

The priest closed his book, and rose from his seat; but at the same moment the Mayor came forward towards the German Red Cross doctor, but there was a curious lack of firmness about his footsteps. It was as if he hardly knew where his legs were bearing him. His voice, however, was strong and defiant. 'I protest!' he cried loudly. 'I strongly and vigorously protest against this favour being shown to the priest! It is on me, as Mayor of Valoise, that there reposes the duty of transmitting

to their families the wishes of our dying soldiers!'

The Herr Doktor brought his two feet together and bowed. 'Your protest, Monsieur le Maire, duly registered will be,' he said coldly. 'Meanwhile I must ask Monsieur le Curé my instructions to obey.' Motioning the old man to precede him, he walked out of the door, and, shutting it, turned the key in the lock.

Quickly the two men walked through the dark garden, and when they were close to the arch which led into the courtyard of the Tournebride, the priest abruptly broke silence. 'Am I to be allowed to administer these dying men?' he asked.

'That may you do,' replied the Herr Doktor shortly.

'Then, Monsieur, I must ask permission to go round by my house and by the church.'

Now this was not exactly in the bond, yet, rather to his own surprise, the Herr Doktor gave his orderly-driver the command. Why not do this thing graciously and thoroughly while he was about it? Thoroughness has always been one of the

great German virtues—so he reminded himself while sitting in the rather airless ambulance, and listening to his high-born patient's fretful remarks.

As the motor ambulance at last drew up on the road opposite to where the barge was moored, there arose a sudden stir in the houses facing the mall. Windows were flung cautiously open, and dark forms leaned out of them.

Curtly instructing the priest to follow him, and requesting his orderlies to await his return, the Herr Doktor preceded the priest down the stone gangway, and on to the deck of the barge. In spite of the stars it was a very dark night, and suddenly he turned on the electric torch strapped to his breast. As he did so his companion uttered a sharp exclamation of surprise. Monsieur le Curé had never seen, he had never even heard of such an invention! It made him realise, as he had not yet done, what terrible, ingenious, irresistible fellows these Germans were.

The big trap-door in the deck had been

opened, and the crane for lowering the wounded man was already in position. Mademoiselle Rouannès had been true to her word, everything had been made ready for the new patient, and the Herr Doktor felt suddenly very glad that he had followed his kindly so-truly-German-and-humane impulse about the priest.

Carefully the two went down the stairs now open to the star-powdered sky, and then the one in command knocked at the door of what he already called in his own mind 'Her ward.'

There followed a moment or two of delay—long enough for the Herr Doktor to become rather impatient. Then, slowly, the door opened, and the electric torch flashed for a moment over Mademoiselle Rouannès' head and breast. She no longer wore the Red Cross cap and veil, and her fair hair formed an aureole above her delicately-tinted face and deep blue eyes. 'If you will ask Jacob, he will tell you everything, Monsieur le Médecin. I have told him to put himself entirely at your disposal. I cannot come just now, for I must not

leave my wounded. Two of them are even now dying.'

She spoke in a quick whisper and in her own language. But the Herr Doktor answered in English. 'Gracious miss, I have brought to you the priest,' he said eagerly.

'I thank you—oh! how I thank you!' There was a thrill of real, heartfelt gratitude in her voice—and something in the Herr Doktor's heart thrilled in answer, as she opened wide the narrow door to let them both come through.

Most of the men, lying stretched out there, on those narrow pallet beds, were asleep, but only the two now so near to death seemed really at peace. The others moved uneasily, and from their bloodless lips there issued painful mutterings and groans. One very young soldier kept counting over and over again—from one to thirty-seven. When he came to *trente-sept*, he always broke off, and began again. In answer to a mute, questioning glance from the Herr Doktor, the Red Cross nurse whispered, 'The thirty-eighth shot struck him. But he only counts like that when he is asleep.' A lad in the farthest

corner, the third man in the danger zone, asked again and again, with a terrible, monotonous reiteration, '*Mais pourquoi? Pourquoi suis-je ici?*'

Again the doctor turned questioningly to Jeanne Rouannès. 'He also always begins asking that question as soon as he falls asleep,' she said sighing; 'when awake he seems quite happy.'

The Herr Doktor was strangely reluctant to leave the mournful scene. He felt an uneasy curiosity as to what was going to take place. Even now the Red Cross nurse was turning a little table, which had been covered with various odd French medicaments, into an altar. But his duty to his own patient called him insistently away, and slowly he backed towards the door. Once there, however, he called out, but in a low voice, 'Miss? Miss? A word with you.'

She came and stood by him, a lovely vision of health, purity, and strength, in that piteous, pain-bound place.

'When the priest has finished,' he murmured, 'I will take him back again. I have myself responsible for him made.'

'I promise you that he will not be very long!' And then she added softly, 'I thank you again, sir, for having done this good action. The good God will reward you.'

She opened the door, and after she had closed it again, the Herr Doktor lingered for a moment outside in the little passage which was now open to the stars and cool night air.

And during the hour he spent in the low-ceilinged, white-washed cabin where Prince Egon now lay comfortably settled in a real bed, the Herr Doktor, though his body was by his patient's side, in his spirit dwelt in the other half of the Red Cross barge—where was taking place the ever august and awe-inspiring transit from life to death of two young, sentient, human beings. So little indeed was he present in mind where his body was, that he experienced a feeling of astonishment, as well as of discomfort, when he suddenly realised that a quick, amicable conversation was going on between the young Prussian officer and Mademoiselle Rouannès' old French man-servant.

'Herr Doktor!' cried Prince Egon joy-

fully, 'this fellow was once a valet—valet to a Prince de Ligne! I have told him that henceforth he is commandeered by me! He will be *my* valet. I would far rather be waited on by him than by that tiresome Fritz of yours. This one is a thoroughly intelligent fellow; he knows a house in this town where there is a great store of those *unanständige* Parisian comic papers. He will bring them here to-morrow morning—so I now have something pleasant to dream about!'

'That is good,' said the Herr Doktor absently. 'I felt sure your Highness would prefer this place to the Tournebride. I hope you will not be disturbed by the French wounded. There is a passage room between.'

'The French wounded will not disturb me!' The young man lifted himself slightly in his bed and smiled. 'It is not as if they were our brave fellows, after all!'

PART II

I

It was half-past five on this, the sixth morning of the Herr Doktor's stay at Valoise.

He leapt out of bed and had a cold plunge bath—a most peculiar, un-German habit he had acquired during the months he had boarded with an English family at Munich.

Then, when he was dressed, not before, he put on his spectacles and went across to the window. On the first morning of his stay there, he had been filled with a queer misgiving that perhaps when he looked out the Red Cross barge would have drifted away—disappeared, fairy-wise, in the night. That he now no longer feared, and on this lovely September morning his eyes rested with a feeling of exultant ownership on the now familiar scene before him. The trim, leafy mall just across the paved road, the

slowly flowing river gleaming in the bright morning sun, the line of poplars above the opposite bank—and then in the centre, as it were, of the placid landscape, the Red Cross barge. . . . they were his, for ever—the harvest of his eyes, of his imagination, of his heart.

The Red Cross barge? The man standing at the window of this humble French wine-shop told himself how good it was that now, to-day, that work of mercy before him was the only reminder in Valoise that France was at war. Till the day before there had been a hundred and five spurred and booted reminders, but yesterday afternoon the Uhlans had ridden off eagerly, exultantly, to join their main victorious army—that army which was now engaged in pursuing the defeated English and the retreating French.

The Herr Doktor, on this peaceful, sunny morning, quite forgot that he himself was a constant reminder of the awful struggle, of the losing fight now going on between those the women of Valoise had sent forth—their husbands, sons, and lovers—and his country-men.

But it was natural he should make this capital omission, for as he stood there, looking out on a still unawakened world, the people of Valoise, well disposed as he felt towards them, formed but a blurred background to the one figure which now possessed all his waking, aye, and all his dreaming thoughts. Not only did he now know, but he exulted in the knowledge that, with his first vision-like sight of Jeanne Rouannès, had come that 'love-at-once' of which some of his comrades had rhapsodised in the now-so-distant-as-to-be-almost-forgotten pre-war time. Those rhapsodies of long ago had left him unmoved, partly because as a student he had adored, with a selfless, hopeless passion, a famous singer far older than himself, and partly because, with the passing of years, he had seen the springtide romance of youth almost invariably dulled down into what would have been, to such a man as he knew himself to be, unendurably dull domesticity.

Was this new, and at once rapturous and painful, absorption in another human being the outcome of great, noble, war-provoked

emotions? If so, how amazing that a Frenchwoman should have compelled the flowering of his soul, the awakening of both spirit and senses to what the union of a man and woman may mean! But well content was he that it should be so. This side of the great war—so futile from the point of view of happy, prosperous France—would soon be at an end. That he had been confidently assured, some three weeks ago, by a member of General von Kluck's own able staff. Within a very short time of the German occupation of Paris—some even believed within a few hours of the capitulation of the city—peace would be signed with France. There would be bitterness among certain sections of the French people—among the Chauvinists, for instance, who still hankered after Alsace. But the Conquerors had behaved so humanely and so wisely during their triumphant rush through Northern France, that this very natural feeling would soon fade away, while the love he, Max Keller, now bore Jeanne Rouannès was of eternal, enduring quality which compels its own fulfilment. . . . Already in his dreams the Herr Doktor saw

his house, his childhood's home, at Weimar, beflowered and garlanded to receive a bride.

But these dreams were far more living and tangible to his imagination during those waking hours when they two were apart, than when the Herr Doktor was faced with the reality of his and Mademoiselle Rouannès' necessarily formal relationship. More than once he had tried to engage her in talk on 'safe' subjects—such subjects, for instance, as that of the Great Revolution—but she had quietly eluded him, and he sometimes had to face the fact that the only common ground on which they met each day was that on which lay the wounded Frenchmen to whom she gave so much anxious care. It was a ground on which the Herr Doktor spent all the time he could. But unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, it was ground which was being rapidly cleared, for thanks to his skill, to her care, and no doubt to nature too, 'our wounded,' as he had once ventured to call them to her, were now in full convalescence, almost fit, in fact, to be taken off as prisoners to Germany. When that thought, that knowledge, rose to

the Herr Doktor's mind he always thrust it hurriedly away. The despatch of prisoners is purely a military duty, and would in this case be performed by whatever officer on whom it devolved; if no one better offered, then on the Herr Lieutenant, Prince Egon von Witgenstein.

Prince Egon? On this fine September morning, the Herr Doktor suddenly found himself wondering whether it would not be advisable to move his patient into the now empty Tournebride. The knowledge that the Prince would soon be well enough to sit up on deck was not as agreeable to the Herr Doktor as it ought to have been to a conscientious medical attendant. True, Mademoiselle Rouannès never even asked him how his noble patient was progressing, and once, when old Jacob had alluded to the Uhlan officer, the Herr Doktor had overheard her exclaim, with a strange touch of passion in her voice, 'I forbid you—I forbid you, Jacob, to speak of that Prussian to me!' But Prince Egon did not share her indifference, still less her—was it hatred? He was frankly interested in his fair enemy,

and very eager to make her acquaintance. But the Herr Doktor was determined that this so uncalled-for and undesirable-from-every-point-of-view desire of the Prince should not be gratified.

There came a knock at the door; it was his *petit déjeuner*, and the woman who brought it in smiled quite pleasantly. It was only the second time she had smiled at her unbidden guest. It was curious how the departure of those burly, good-natured Uhlans had affected the people of Valoise! Within an hour of their going, windows had been unshuttered, doors unbarred, and a stream of women, of children, and of old men the Herr Doktor had not suspected of being in Valoise at all, had flowed into the streets of the town. . . .

He drank his coffee and ate his rolls with an excellent appetite, and then he glanced at his chronometer. It was three minutes to six—time he went across to the barge. For when six struck by the church tower (which, according to his Baedeker, had been built by the English in the now

utterly departed days of their valour and military prowess, that is in the thirteenth century) the Herr Doktor invariably met Mademoiselle Rouannès by accident, either in the road, or, what was pleasanter still, under the trees in the mall. When he saw her coming, gravely he would stop and bow, and she would bend her head in greeting. It would have been natural, and agreeable too, for them to linger a few moments; but that he had soon found she would never do. Singularly reserved always was she in her manner, and in vain did he persist in his attempts to persuade her to engage in general beneficial-to-the-intellect and pleasantly-agreeable-to-the-cultured-mind conversation.

Two cases, as we know, had been beyond human help when he had first undertaken the care of the French wounded, but the third case, greatly owing to his skill and untiring efforts, seemed likely to pull through. Still, even so, the Herr Doktor and Mademoiselle Rouannès were very anxious about this case, a boy of nineteen, a clever, well-mannered, gentle boy of the peasant class, who had been shot through the lung. What had

touched the German surgeon's heart, what had made him especially interested in this young soldier, were a few words which had been uttered by the Red Cross nurse very early in their joint work of mercy. '*Il est le seul soutien de sa vieille grand'mère.*' Now, curiously enough, he, Max Keller, was also 'the sole support of his old grandmother,' a grand old woman of seventy-nine, now eating her heart out in placid, cultured Weimar, while thanking God her boy was not in the firing line.

The Herr Doktor went across the road to the grateful shade of the lime trees. There he waited, his heart beating, his pulse throbbing, for what seemed a long, long time. Every moment he hoped, nay, he expected confidently, to see her hastening towards him, clad in the white dress and wearing the medieval-looking cap, with its red cross in the centre, which now seemed the most becoming head-dress in the world. Hastening towards him? Nay, nay, — hastening towards the Red Cross barge.

But the minutes went slowly by, and

Mademoiselle Rouannès did not come. Suddenly it occurred to him that perhaps she was already on the barge. If so, he had indeed wasted precious moments. . . .

As he hurried along the stone jetty he saw the stout figure of old Thérèse on deck. That meant that her young mistress was below, in the ward.

The Herr Doktor smiled pleasantly at the old woman, and she smiled back, a broad genial smile of good fellowship. What a difference the departure of those few countrymen of his yesterday had made, to be sure!

But when he hurried down to the French ward he at once knew, without being told, that Mademoiselle Jeanne had not yet arrived. Old Thérèse had done her best, but it was a very poor best, to make the men lying there comfortable. Still, they all looked more cheerful than usual, and the boy he now hoped to save, the boy for whom he had a very tender corner in his kindly, sentimental soul, caught hold of his hand as he went by, and asked huskily, 'Is it true that the Prussians are gone? *Quel bonheur!*'

It struck half-past six, seven, then half-past seven.

The Herr Doktor went up again on to the deck. Thérèse was sitting there sewing. 'And Mademoiselle?' he asked questioningly.

She shook her head. 'Mademoiselle was very unhappy last night. She thinks her father is much worse. I myself can see no difference. But something he said to her frightened her, and so she said she must stop at home to-day, and nurse him.'

He felt absurdly surprised, absurdly annoyed, absurdly taken aback.

Had Mademoiselle Rouannès a right to leave the ambulance barge? He doubted it—doubted it very much indeed. Of course he himself, being now in command of the barge, could *order* her to come. He was a Red Cross doctor, and she a Red Cross nurse; he had, therefore, the absolute right to dispose of her time and services. But, sighing, he dismissed the thought. She was quite unlike any German girl he had ever seen. It would not occur to her to be flattered, or even touched, by his imperious wish for her presence.

As he stood there, wondering what he had better do, there flashed into his mind the wording of a short note which it might become his duty to write to her. The note would be written in English, and it would run somewhat in this wise: 'Gracious Miss,' —or perhaps it would be better to put plain 'Miss' in the French way—'If you your father can leave for a short time, I should be glad if to the barge you would come. One of your wounded is not so well.—Yours respectfully, MAX KELLER.'

There would be nothing offensive, nothing hectoring about such a missive, and he thought, he felt sure, that it would bring her. But he would not write that note yet. He would wait till he had seen his own patient, Prince Egon. Luckily, there was no hurry as to that, and, still secretly hoping she would come, he lingered on, up on deck.

The sun had gone behind a cloud. There was an autumnal chill in the morning air. The waters of the slowly flowing river looked grey and sullen. Suddenly the Herr Doktor felt oddly friendless, and alone. 'This

morning I felt so foolishly cheerful, and this is the natural reaction!' he exclaimed to himself.

He turned and walked down to Prince Egon's small quarters. Cautiously he opened the narrow door, but his patient was awake and smiling.

What a contrast this curious little cabin presented, especially to-day, to that containing the French wounded! Here everything was ship-shape, even to a modest degree, luxurious. On an inlaid table, which had been 'commandeered' from an empty villa, were laid out gold-backed brushes, and a number of pretty trifles. Above the table hung a circular mirror, also commandeered, and there was a whiff of some sweet, pungent scent in the air. How different, too, the white and pink yellow-haired youth lying there from the small, dark, and now unshaved Frenchmen on the other side. Old Jacob was kept too busy attending on the Prussian prince to spare any time for his own countrymen.

The Herr Doktor looked at what had partly been his own handiwork—the handi-

work of which he had felt proud on the first evening of his arrival at Valoise—with a feeling of dissatisfaction, almost of disgust.

Over a basket-chair was carefully spread out a green-and-gold-silk dressing-gown, in the Weimar surgeon's eyes a garment of almost Oriental splendour.

'If you will allow of it, Herr Doktor, I propose to get up,' said Prince Egon cheerfully. 'I feel wonderfully better to-day! It is extraordinary what good this rest has done me. And then that old Jacob! An almost perfect valet! What good fortune for me that he should be here! He has already made me a delicious omelette this morning.'

'And your Highness was not afraid to eat it?' This was really a little joke on the Herr Doktor's part. But his patient did not so accept it. An extraordinary change came over the recumbent man's fair face; it became livid, discomposed.

'God in heaven!' he cried. 'Do you suspect old Jacob, Herr Doktor?'

And then the older man burst into laughter. 'No, no,' he said soothingly. 'I

suspect nothing! Besides your Highness has made it very much worth old Jacob's while to keep you alive.'

'Aye, aye! That's true.' The prince was reassured. 'As I was saying just now, I feel so much better that, if you permit it, I propose to get up. I will wear my dressing-gown, not my uniform, and I will go up on deck. There I will sit and chat with the beautiful English-speaking Mamselle. Jacob tells me that on her mother's side she is of noble birth, and that, although her father is only a physician, she——'

The Herr Doktor put up his hand. 'I must now take your Highness' temperature,' he said a little sharply. 'I doubt much if you are well enough to go upstairs. A chill would be very serious in your Highness's condition. As for the Red Cross Sister, she is not here to-day. Her father is very ill.'

'Not here? But that is absurd!' The young man spoke with a touch of imperious decision. 'You must send for her, my dear Herr Doktor; she must be requisitioned!' He smiled—an insolent smile.

The other shook his head. A sudden passion of dislike, of contempt, for his patient filled his heart. But all he said was—

'Impossible! Her father is very ill indeed.'

'Then I will not trouble to get up. I am very well where I am. It is very comfortable here.'

Prince Egon spoke pettishly. He had looked forward to an amusing flirtation with the Mamselle with whose manifold perfections old Jacob sometimes entertained him.

The hours of the morning dragged wearily on. To the Herr Doktor it seemed as if there had never been such a long, such an utterly lacking-in-flavour, day as was this day. For the first time he talked to the convalescent Frenchmen at some length of themselves. Not one of them had been a soldier at the time the war broke out on that fateful 1st of August, and yet it surprised him, and in a sense moved him, to see that every one of them wished to go back and fight. Not one of them seemed conscious that he was now a prisoner, and that, unless peace was made at once, he would soon be in Germany. . . .

II

At twelve o'clock the Herr Doktor walked up to the Tournebride. He had thought it possible that he might meet Mademoiselle Rouannès in the town—but it was in vain that he lingered on the way, and glanced up each steep byway, and quiet, shady street.

While he was eating an excellent *déjeuner* at a table spread under the trees in the courtyard of the inn, he cleverly led Madame Blanc on to the subject of Dr. Rouannès. She, too, seemed quite another woman now that the Tournebride was her own again. To-day she was eager for a gossip.

Yes, '*ce bon docteur*' was certainly seriously ill. He had looked so well, so vigorous, when he had started, a month ago, for the Frontier. It was there that a shell had exploded in the room where he was actually performing a small operation on a man wounded during the dash into Alsace. As he had been struck in the left leg, it was impossible for him to go on with his work, and he had managed to get home. At first

it had been said that he would soon be all right again. But now it was rumoured that he was dying! If that were indeed true, Dr. Rouannès would be a great loss to Valoise, for he was an excellent doctor, much beloved in the town. His daughter was thought rather proud—very good to '*les pauvres*,' but unwilling to frequent the more well-to-do townsfolk. This, no doubt, because her mother was '*une noble*.' Madame Blanc smiled as she did not often smile now, as she recalled the marriage of Dr. Rouannès. He had refused such excellent '*occasions*'—such rich marriages when he was young and good-looking! Then, when he was forty-six years of age, and a confirmed bachelor, he had suddenly married Mademoiselle Jeanne de Blignière, the younger of the two daughters of the Count de Blignière, a poor, proud old gentleman whom he, the doctor, had attended, out of charity no doubt. Curious to relate, this '*mariage étrange*' had been a very happy one, and this though Madame Rouannès was very, very quiet, gentle, and pious too, in fact rather like '*une bonne Sœur*.' She

had been ill two years, and Dr. Rouannès had brought many physicians from Paris to see her. It was said that the chemist's bill alone had been a thousand francs! But the poor lady had died all the same, and she, Madame Blanc, would never forget Monsieur le Médecin's tragic, stricken face at the funeral.

It had been thought that he would surely marry again. But no, he had not done so. At first Madame Rouannès' sister had come to take care of the motherless little girl, but Mademoiselle de Blignière had never liked her brother-in-law, so she soon went back to Paris. Then for some time Mademoiselle Jeanne had had '*une anglaise*.' It was only last winter, while visiting her aunt in Paris, that she had learnt the Red Cross work.

At last the Herr Doktor finished his delicious *déjeuner* under the yellowing chestnut trees in the great courtyard which now looked so peaceful and so solitary, and he wondered, a little ashamed of the materialism of the unspoken question, if Mademoiselle Rouannès knew anything of the practical

side of French cookery. And after he had had his cup of coffee and smoked his pipe, he took his diary out of his pocket. He had not opened the book for nearly a week.

Quickly he turned over the blank pages—and then a sudden wave of emotion swept over him. To-day was the 2nd of September—Sedan Day! And he had not remembered it! He thought of last year's Sedan Day, spent with some dear old friends of his childhood, and his heart became irradiated with a peculiar, tender radiance. Beautiful, culture-filled Weimar! How he longed to show his dear homeland to his 'Geliebte'! Then a less noble feeling, one of fierce exultation filled him. He visioned the great hosts of the Fatherland, his brothers all, pressing forward through this splendid, opulent land of France. Those great hosts must now be close to the gates of Paris—nay, they were perchance in Paris already, celebrating the great anniversary while preparing to play the rôle of magnanimous conquerors. . . .

Only yesterday had come news of wonderful doings—and he had scarcely cared to hear them! Tidings of the invading army

brought by two officers in charge of an armoured motor-car. Tidings of victory of course; and of one especial victory which they had felt peculiarly pleasant and *ermutigend*, the defeat and complete encirclement, that is, of the small British Expeditionary Force. The English, so had run the tale, still turned now and again and fought, not without courage, small rearguard actions, but they were not causing any real trouble. Already Compiègne was evacuated, and Chantilly was ready for the Kaiser's occupation. It was from the magnificent home of '*Le Grand Condé*' that the War Lord intended to start for the entry of his victorious army through the Arc de Triomphe, into Paris.

Of course the Herr Doktor had been quite pleased to hear all this glorious news, but though he realised how inspiriting it was to know that within a day and a half's march of Valoise pressed on the relentless march on Paris, he had not really cared. Valoise had suddenly become to him the one place in the world which mattered. The only place where he wished to be—to stay. . . .

He knew that the city of Paris, as apart

from the rest of France, was to pay a huge indemnity. Until that indemnity was paid, there was to be an army of occupation, not only in the city, but in the surrounding country. Of this army he, as a non-combatant, could easily obtain permission to form part. . . .

And then as he walked restlessly up and down the courtyard, there suddenly rose on the still, warm air a long-drawn distant roar of sound.

Thunder? The Herr Doktor shook his head, and his heart began to beat a little quicker. He knew what that sound portended, and he also remembered enough to know that the action proceeding must be a long, long way off.

Madame Blanc came out of her kitchen. '*On commence à se battre là-bas.*' There was an undertone of hope, of fierce joy—even of boastfulness—in her voice.

He bent his head gravely. The expression on her face irritated him. Till to-day he had thought her an excellent, homely woman. He could no longer think her so, for there was an awful look of vengeful longing in her eyes.

3

And during all that warm, early September afternoon, across the golden haze thrown up by the river, there came from '*là-bas*' the rolling, muttering roar that was so like thunder, that now and again the Herr Doktor asked himself whether it might not be thunder after all? But whatever this provenance, these sounds had a strange, electric effect on the French wounded. They became restless and excited. Hitherto they had stayed below; now, without asking the Herr Doktor's permission, two or three pallid faces appeared above the stairway, and there was a look of strained suspense, almost of hope, in the eyes which avoided looking frankly into his face.

There was yet another curious change in all those young, wild-eyed Frenchmen. They talked in low hoarse whispers the one with the other, and once he heard a reference to *la nouvelle armée*, and then again to *l'armée de Versailles*. Of what army, new or old, could they be thinking? Brave but unready France had put every man for whom she

had proper arms and accoutrements into the field from the first day.

Prince Egon shared in the subdued excitement. 'It is pleasant to feel that we are no longer away from the whirlpool!' he cried joyfully, and this was his only remark during that intolerably long afternoon.

At six o'clock the sounds of firing ceased as suddenly as they had begun. Four hours' desultory cannonade? It must have been a long-drawn-out rearguard action.

The Herr Doktor was sitting up on deck, a pocket volume of Heine in his hand. He read the verse—

Im wunderschonen Mönat Mai
Als alle Knospen sprangen
Da ist in meinem Herzen
Die Liebe aufgegangen.

And then he looked up and gazed across the river. Strange, strange indeed, that love should wait till now to blossom in his heart!

There came the sound, the now beloved, familiar sound of Her quick, light footfalls on the jetty, and a moment later Mademoiselle Rouannès walked on to the barge.

Leaping to his feet, he brought his heels

together and bowed. But the ceremonious words of inquiry he was about to utter concerning her father's state were stayed on his lip, and the secret joy which had flooded his whole being on seeing her was suddenly changed to concern, even distress, so unlike did Jeanne Rouannès appear to his usual vision of her. Her face was flushed, her eyelids reddened by much crying. The look of composure, of dignity, which always aroused his willing admiration, if also his aching sense of her aloofness from himself, was gone, and now there was something appealing, as well as piteous and even helpless, in the face into which he was gazing.

'I have come to ask you,' she said abruptly, and in English, 'if you will give me a little of your small store of morphia or laudanum? My father is now in constant pain—I fear he is far more ill than he will admit is the case. I am very, very anxious about him.' She uttered the words with quick, nervous haste, lowering her voice as she spoke.

Was it possible that she thought there could be any fear of his refusing her request? Apparently there was, for, 'I know you do

not like to diminish your store of narcotics. But from what I understand a quite small amount might lessen the pain my father is enduring.'

She had moved away from the middle of the deck, and they were standing, side by side, on the river side of the barge. As she spoke she did not look at the man by her side, instead she stared straight before her, and he saw the tears well up into her tired eyes, and roll down her pale cheeks.

'Would it not possible be,' he asked, 'for me to see your father?'

'No. That is quite impossible. But I thank you for thinking of doing so.'

'But if you tell him that I too belong to the Red Cross,—that splendid, so-entirely-neutral and internationally-universal institution—surely he would then consent me to see?'

She shook her head. 'The truth is that—that——' She stopped, and he said 'Yes?' interrogatively, encouragingly. 'The truth is that my poor father had a most unfortunate experience with some German Red Cross doctors!'

'With German doctors,' he repeated, discomfited. 'That very strange is.'

'Yes, it was strange—strange and most unfortunate, as matters now are; for it makes me feel that I do not dare propose your visit to him.'

The Herr Doktor—or so it seemed to the girl standing by his side—fell into an abstracted silence. She respected his mood for a few moments, then she asked timidly, in a voice very different from that which he had ever heard issue from her proud lips before, 'I suppose your medical stores are at the Tournebride?'

He looked round eagerly. 'No,' he said quickly. 'I have them here, in the motor ambulance, and what necessary is, I go at once to procure. But, gracious miss! There has come to me a thought which I find most illuminating, a thought which I beg you earnestly to consider before you reject it. With my medical stores possess I naturally operation overalls.'

He stopped for a moment, as if anxious to give himself time, then went on hurriedly: 'Would it not possible be for me to put on

an overall (it covers entirely my 'feld-grau' uniform) and then to represent an English doctor by the bedside of your honoured father? He surely would not object to see an English or, better still, a Scotch colleague?'

'That,' she said, and drew a long breath, 'is very true.'

And as he gazed at her with an earnest, longing look of the inner meaning of which she was, as he well knew, utterly unconscious, he saw surprise and indecision give way to hope and relief.

'But are you willing to do that?' she asked. 'Would it not be very—very disagreeable for you to carry through such a—a——' Her English failed her, and she uttered a word of which he was ignorant, and could only guess the meaning—'to carry through such a *supercherie*?' she said.

He answered eagerly, 'There is nothing I would not do'— and then he checked himself, and substituted for what he had been going to say, the words, 'for a French colleague. Absolutely easy will it be,' he went on confidently. 'You will him tell

that I very little French know—which indeed the truth is.'

Even as he spoke, her woman's wit was hard at work. 'I will write my father a note,' she said, 'and send it by Thérèse. Then he will not be able to say "No" to me, and I on my side shall not have the pain of speaking a lie to him face to face.'

The Herr Doktor's face relaxed into a smile; women, so he reflected, were the same all the world over—in France as in Germany. He took out of his breast pocket a neat letter-case, of which he had made no use since his arrival in Valoise. Deferentially he handed it to her, and then he had the pleasure of seeing her write a letter on his note-paper. 'Do you think that will do?' she said. And he read over slowly and carefully the short, clear French phrases.

'My dear Father,—An English doctor has joined the Red Cross barge. I much desire that he should see thee. I will bring him with me in an hour. As far as I can judge he is experienced.

'Thy

'Jeanne.'

'Most excellent, honoured miss! And only one little word not absolutely true is!' He ventured a smile. She smiled back with the words, 'But it is a very important word — "English"!' And then she wondered why his face altered and stiffened into such frowning gravity; the English, after all, were no more the Herr Doktor's enemies than were the French.

4

They sped along, two white, ghost-like figures, in the darkness. Every light in the little town was already extinguished, or hidden behind high walls and closely drawn curtains. Valoise only asked to be forgotten, to be obliterated from the map, while the awful tide of war swayed and swept on, within some twenty miles of the town, towards Paris.

Jeanne Rouannès walked as swiftly and unfalteringly as if it had been broad daylight through the steep byways and up the roughly paved alleys leading to the Haute Ville. But it seemed a long time ere they emerged into a street, lighted by one twinkling

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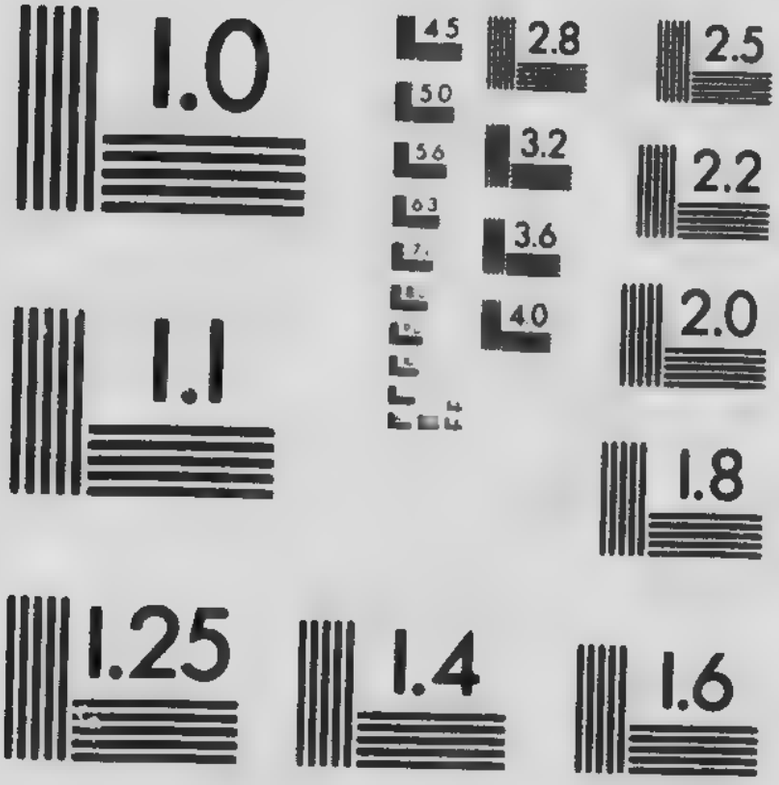

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lamp which swung suspended over the centre of the highway.

'You are interested in the Revolution?' she said in English. 'Well, thirty people were hung in this street, from where that lamp now swings, a hundred and twenty years ago. That was the meaning of "à la lanterne!"'

'Ach!' exclaimed the Herr Doktor, gazing upwards. 'That truly informative is!' And while he uttered these words he was telling himself—that secret self to whom each of us tells so many amazing, unexpected, tragic and, yes, sometimes such delicious things—that this was the first time she had ever spoken to him, of her own volition, on any subject which lay quite outside her Red Cross work. That she had done so made him feel exultant, absurdly happy. Soon, quite soon, every barrier would surely be down between their two hearts. . . .

She moved on a few steps, and then stopped in front of an aperture sunk far back in the wall which ran to the right of the historic lantern.

'We have arrived,' she said, and turning

the handle of the door, she stepped back to allow him to pass through first.

He waited awkwardly for a moment. 'Won't you the way lead?' he asked; and quickly she walked past him into a garden which in the darkness seemed illimitable. Sweet pungent scents rose and mingled from each side of the narrow flagged path, and to his moved and ardent imagination it was as if Nature herself was offering the homage of her incense to the French girl now leading him into the sanctuary of her home.

Suddenly he saw a small low house rise whitely before him; a door opened, and a shaft of yellow light illumined the short, broad figure of the old woman servant, Thérèse, for in her hand she held a lamp with a gay Chinese shade over it.

Mademoiselle Rouannès called out, 'Here we are, Thérèse!' Then she turned round to her companion. 'If you will kindly wait in my salon for a moment, I will go and tell my father that you are here,' she said in a low voice.

Her white figure melted into the darkness and he followed the servant down a passage,

and into what was evidently the only sitting-room of the little house. Then Thérèse shut the door on him, and the Herr Doktor began looking about him with eager curiosity.

The room was not gay and bright as he would have thought to find a young Frenchwoman's salon. Rather was it simple and austere. The few pieces of furniture were of the First Empire period, of mahogany and brass, covered with bright green silk which with time had become dulled in tint, and even frayed. In the middle of the room was a marble-topped round table on which stood a lamp, fellow to that which old Thérèse had held in her hand. On the round table lay several books, and a magazine, the 'Revue des Deux Mondes,' to which the Herr Doktor in the now-so-far-away days of peace had been a subscriber.

He bent down and looked at the familiar orange cover. It bore the date of August 1. Idly he looked at the table of contents: no prevision, no suspicion even, of the coming cataclysm! He wondered whether the number of August 15 had been published. He thought it unlikely.

He turned away from the table, and looked up and about him. Above a narrow, straight settee hung two charming eighteenth-century pastels—that of a young man in a blue and silver uniform, and that of a slim, pale girl with powdered hair. She had a wistful and yet a proud little face, and it pleased the Herr Doktor to trace in this portrait a resemblance to Mademoiselle Rouannès.

At last the door opened, and he felt a slight shock of disappointment at seeing that it was old Thérèse, and not her young mistress, who had come for him. Stepping lightly, he followed her up a shallow staircase, and so to a landing on the first floor.

Jeanne Rouannès was standing there, waiting for him. She had changed from her white uniform into a black gown, and this change of dress altered her strangely. It made her look younger, slenderer, paler, more beautiful even than before in the Herr Doktor's eyes, for it intensified her peculiar fairness, and deepened the fire in her blue eyes.

Perhaps something in his face showed his surprise, for she said in English, and

in a very low voice, 'I never wear my Red Cross dress when I am with my father. It disturbs him—makes him remember——' and then, without finishing her sentence, she pushed open a red-baize door, and beckoned to him to follow her. As he did so, she put her finger to her lips and whispered, 'Wait here a moment——'

From where he stood, just within the door, he could see only one half of the room, and that half bare, save that the walls were lined with books set on mahogany shelves. Standing at right angles across the one corner visible from the door was a writing-table, covered with grey cloth. A high screen to his left hid the rest of the room.

The Herr Doktor's heart began to beat quickly. He told himself that he was about to enter into the very heart of her life—to take an amazing step forward in his intimacy with her. . . .

A word or two was whispered behind the screen, and then she came for him. As together they walked forward into the room, she exclaimed, in French of course, 'Papa, I bring you the kind——'

But the words were cut across by the leonine-looking, grey-haired man sitting up in bed. 'Welcome!' cried Dr. Rouannès heartily. He stretched out both his hands. 'Welcome, my dear colleague—nay, I should now say, my dear ally! My daughter tells me that you speak French. Unhappily I do not know your splendid language, but, as you see, Jeanne was taught English. For some years after the death of my beloved wife, we had living with us a charming person, our excellent Miss—Miss——'

'Miss Owen,' said Mademoiselle Rouannès quietly.

'Yes, yes, Miss Owen!' He waited a moment; then he looked up at his daughter. 'My little girl,' he said, and there was a very tender, caressing inflection in his resonant French voice, 'I will now ask you to go downstairs while I confer with our friend.'

With a curiously impulsive gesture she clasped her hands together. 'But no, father!' she exclaimed. 'Remember that I am your nurse! Surely you will let me stay?' She looked beseechingly, not at her father, but at the silent man now standing by her side.

'Mademoiselle your daughter is an excellent nurse,' observed the Herr Doktor awkwardly.

The old man leant back on his pillow, wearily. He had hoped his English colleague would be more expansive, and '*sympathique*.' Also, he had thought to see an older man, one who would understand, without any need for explanation, his point of view about his daughter.

'I only wish you to leave the room for five minutes, my child. One word I *must* say to Monsieur alone.'

She obeyed without further demur, and as the door closed behind her, the Frenchman put out his hot, sinewy, right hand and seized the younger man's.

'Not a word!' he exclaimed in a hurried whisper. 'Not a word, you understand, of the truth for her! Gangrene has set in. There is nothing to be done now—it's too late. Why I consented to see you was, first, to procure for myself the pleasure of meeting an English confrère (an honour as well as a very great pleasure, I assure you)—and then with the hope that you were

likely to know some—what shall I say?—palliative—ay, that's the word!—to make things less painful for her, as well as for me too, when comes the end.'

The Herr Doktor nodded his head understandingly.

'I tell you this,' went on the other quickly, 'because my daughter, as a matter of fact, knows nothing of illness, nothing of wounds——' He waited a moment. 'Perhaps you have a daughter—a child of your own?'

The Herr Doktor shook his head.

'Ah well, at your age I too was not married! More, like you, perhaps, I intended not to marry. But, some day your heart will play you a trick—wait till then, it's worth it—and you will come to realise how carefully one tries to guard one's children, especially one's daughter, from what is painful and disagreeable. I could not prevent Jeanne from taking charge of this Red Cross barge. She belongs to the Secours aux Blessés Militaires, and she has been through the course they give their young girl members. But, naturally, I should not have allowed her to go to a military hospital. A Red

Cross barge is different. There are only convalescents there—and old Jacob, whom you will have seen, gave me his word that she should be sheltered from anything unpleasant or—or unsuitable.' He waited a few moments, and then, in a very different voice, added: 'But now, my dear colleague, we will consider my case—otherwise she will be growing impatient.'

He drew down his bed-clothes, and an involuntary exclamation of concern, of surprise, of regret escaped from the Herr Doktor's lips.

'Yes, you see how it is with me? One of those new-fangled injections at the right moment might have stopped the mischief. On the other hand, it might not.' He shrugged his shoulders, and exclaimed, 'Yes, there's nothing to be done! But I want to know if your opinion coincides with mine as to how much time I have left. That is important, for I have arrangements to make. When I am gone, my daughter will have to find her way to Paris, to her aunt, Mademoiselle de Blignière.'

'To Paris?' The Herr Doktor could

not keep the amazement he felt out of his voice.

The old man looked up at him quickly. 'Yes, my dear colleague, to Paris—why not?'

'But—but——' The Herr Doktor reddened, then very quietly, even deprecatingly, he said, 'But, Monsieur le Docteur—the Germans? Will they not in Paris be?'

'No,' said Dr. Rouannès confidently. 'They will be kept out of Paris. I only wish she—aye, and I too—were in Paris now!'

There was a pause, a rather painful pause, between the two men.

'You do not believe what I say about Paris?' said Dr. Rouannès abruptly.

'No, I regret to say that I cannot your opinion share.' The Herr Doktor forced himself to say the words.

'You do not know Joffre.' The old doctor looked up at him reflectively. 'Very few people know Joffre—I do. We were at school together. I saw him not so very long ago. In fact just before I was wounded.' Then he called out, 'Jeanne! Ma petite Jeanne!'

The door opened, and Mademoiselle Rouannès walked in, pale, composed, but with lips quivering piteously.

'... not look so anxious,' said her father quickly. 'As I have always told you, there is no mystery about my condition—none at all! My English colleague agrees with me that it's a very nasty wound. Well, you know that already! I'm not as young as I was—that is against me; on the other hand, I'm a very healthy man. You are not to trouble about me one way or the other. Certain things which we are lacking this gentleman will provide out of his stores. The English ambulance service is the best in the world.'

And then the Herr Doktor made his one mistake. 'Nein, nein!' he muttered. And then he felt his heart stand still.

But his new patient had not heard the protest. In a stronger, heartier voice he exclaimed, 'Ah yes, that's right! I wondered when it was coming——'

The door had opened, and Thérèse walked round the corner of the screen, carrying a tray on which were three small

glasses, a bottle of Malaga, and some little dry cakes.

'Do you mind stopping a few minutes and having a talk with my father?' Jeanne Rouannès spoke in English. 'It's very'—she hesitated for a word, then found it—'it's very dull for him when I am away all day.'

Eagerly the Herr Doktor sat down.

'And now,' exclaimed the patient, 'we will forget illness and trouble! We will talk of the glorious British Army, and of your ships—that splendid navy which encircles and guards our shores. What would the Little Corporal have said to all this, hein?' Then more seriously he went on, 'I was put out of action almost at once, and that is why I saw nothing of my British confrères. I regret to say that I did see something of the German doctors'—the colour rushed into his face, flamed over his broad forehead, and up to the roots of his white hair.

'Father!' said his daughter imploringly, 'Father, be calm!'

'I am calm—I am absolutely calm! But I must tell our friend of my experience,

if only because it will show him—it will show him——'

'Father!' she said again, 'why talk of it now? It will only excite you unduly.'

'No, it does not excite me—not in the least! Our English friend here will be interested—deeply interested—in my story. It is one which should be published in'—he waited a moment, then brought out triumphantly the name—'yes, the *Lancet*—it should be written in the *Lancet*. Perhaps M. le Docteur will himself write it?'

He stopped short, and looked inquiringly at the man sitting by his bedside.

'Most certainly will I it do, my dear confrère.' As he spoke the lying words, Max Keller looked, not at the old man in bed, but at Mademoiselle Jeanne, and there was a kindly, steady, reassuring expression in his eyes.

She had grown scarlet with annoyance, with—was it fear? The Herr Doktor longed to reassure her, to make her feel at ease. How little she understood the self-control, the generosity, the masculine good sense of the German character! As if he would

or could mind anything which this poor, old, prejudiced Frenchman, dying so bravely of a gangrenous wound, was likely to say or think of the splendid surgeons now adorning the German Medical Corps! Courteously he bent forward to hear what the man in bed was saying.

'Yes, my dear confrère, what I am about to tell you deserves to be put on record! But I will not take up much of your time—I will be brief, very brief.'

He waited a moment, and then, with a curious change of tone, very quietly Dr. Rouannès told his story. 'It was a few days before I was wounded, between two of the early battles. Six of us had been sent to hastily organise a field hospital'—a bitter look came into his face. 'As you know, for it is, alas! no secret, we were caught, thanks to our fine Government, quite unprepared. . . . But to return to our muttons—we of the Red Cross were being cordially entertained by one of our generals and his staff, when one afternoon a number of our brave fellows came in with a capture! Such fools were we, such quixotic fools—it is not yet

a month ago, but we have all changed by now—that we were angered when we discovered that this capture consisted of four German ambulance waggons, and of ten German doctors.'

The Herr Doktor moved uncomfortably in his chair; it creaked a little.

'Because we were such quixotic fools—and our general, Monsieur, shared our folly and our quixotry—we invited these German confrères to join us at dinner. We were sorry for them, we felt ashamed they had been detained. We intended to send them away next day, back to their own side. We were the more interested in them owing to the simple fact that, like ourselves, they had not yet been in action—so far was clear, they wore quite new uniforms and their equipment was superb. Ah, Monsieur, their equipment made our mouths water! Another thing also filled us with envy and, yes, a little shame. All ten of these medical gentlemen spoke French, and excellent French too; but only one of us six spoke German! Fortunately three or four of the officers attached to our General spoke German too—

not perhaps very well, but still sufficiently to understand. Fortunately, very fortunately as it turned out, the one of us doctors who could speak German was a very intelligent man. He was, Monsieur, from Luxembourg, and some of his medical studies had actually been carried out in Germany. Bref, he spoke German like a German.'

The old man waited a moment. 'Have patience with me,' he said quietly. 'It will not take you long to hear my story, but the preliminaries are important. . . . Down we all sat to an excellent dinner. "One thing at least we can show them," observed a friend to me. "Our cooking, at any rate, is superior to theirs!" Our confrère, the man who spoke German, did not say much, he remained curiously silent during the meal; but the Germans talked a good deal with us other five. They proved pleasant, for they were each and all cultivated men. Before we sat down we Frenchmen arranged not to touch on anything controversial. But, as was natural under the circumstances, we talked what you English call "shop"—we talked, that is, in an impersonal, courteous

manner of wounds, and of the treatment of wounds; for from the day war had broken out we had naturally all been reading up everything we could lay our hands on about this terrible and fascinating subject.'

'You are getting tired, Father——'

Jeanne Rouannès came forward as she said the words, but the old man raised his voice: 'No, I am not tired—not tired at all! They were ten Germans to us five Frenchmen, for, as I have already told you, our Luxembourg confrère hardly spoke at all. It was he, however, who towards the end of dinner got up and left the room, and his absence, rather to our surprise, seemed to make certain of our German confrères slightly uneasy. More than one of them asked why he had thus absented himself. . . . They soon had an answer to their question, for at the end of perhaps ten minutes he came back, and with him was the General. Our German guests rose to their feet with perfect courtesy as the General walked forward. He was pale, Monsieur—he was pale as you may be sure he never had been, he never would be, in action. "Gentlemen,"

he exclaimed, "I have to perform a disagreeable task! Your confrère here — if indeed he is your confrère—is convinced that among you there are a proportion of men who are not doctors, and who, to put it bluntly, know nothing of medicine. He is convinced, gentlemen, that out of you ten men there are four spies who have taken advantage of the Red Cross uniform to obtain information useful to our enemies. I now ask him, and his five French confrères, to constitute themselves into a court-martial; and you, gentlemen, will each in turn submit yourself to a short cross-examination. You all speak French so perfectly that it will be a very easy matter for you to answer the simple questions which will be put to you."'

Dr. Rouannès drew a long breath.

'I do not mind confessing to you that I thought this proposal an outrage! I had no doubt at all that the ten men before me were Red Cross surgeons. I come, Monsieur, of a Bonapartist family. I can remember 1870—the foolish, senseless cry, "We are betrayed!" On this occasion I felt as if that same ignoble cry was being raised

again. "This Luxembourg confrère is afraid. He is nervous. He has the spy mania!" I exclaimed to myself. But I did notice —I could not help noticing—that of the ten men standing before us two had turned horribly pale. But what of that? Might not anyone turn pale when accused of so hateful and loathly a thing as is that of which those men were being accused?'

He paused—it seemed a very long time to his two listeners.

'Well, my dear confrère—you will already have guessed the end of my story! The two hours which followed the decree of our General were the most painful of my life. But the Luxembourg doctor had made one mistake. He had thought to find four spies —Monsieur, there were five. Exactly half of these ten men wearing the Red Cross knew nothing of medicine—nothing of surgery. The fifth man, he who had escaped suspicion, was more intelligent than the others; he, at any rate, had taken the trouble to make himself conversant with certain things which are the ABC of our noble profession. Perchance he was the son of a doctor—who knows?

You will ask why we were so long as two hours? We were two hours because we first took those whom our Luxembourg confrère believed to be medical men. We put them through a very thorough examination and they came out of it admirably. Then we took the others. Ah, Monsieur, that did not take long! We knew the truth very, very soon—almost within the first few moments. For the matter of that they scarcely went to the trouble of denying what we suspected—only the one of whom I have just spoken tried to deceive us. They were brave men—that I will say frankly—those Prussian officers who had done so dastardly a thing. Indeed, Monsieur, I do not mind admitting to you that, in the end, I understood their point of view far more than I did that of the five medical men who had lent themselves to so unprofessional an act of treachery. As for the spies, they were working for their country. I repeat, they were brave men. Not one of them flinched. A confrère who had been attached to a medical mission in the East said to me afterwards that to him they recalled fanatics.

For the matter of that, even the German surgeons were not aware of the enormity of their crime. There seemed no shame among them—indeed, as one of them put it to me quite plainly, each of them placed his Fatherland above his sense of professional honour.'

And then at last the Herr Doktor spoke. 'You do not think any French Red Cross surgeon would such a—a trick have practised?'

And Jeanne Rouannès, glancing at him quickly, and then averting her eyes, saw that his usually pale face was red.

The old man stared at him, surprised. He lifted his shaggy white eyebrows. 'I cannot answer for *every* member of the French Army Medical Corps,' he answered, with a touch of impatience. 'But I can answer for it that you would not have found five men, nay, not three, willing to do such a thing in concert. Had such a proposal been made to them, one and all, I am quite convinced, would have refused. Further, I assert that no French general would have dared to make to them so dishonourable a proposal. The Red Cross, as you know, my dear confrère,

is an international institution; if it is to be used to cover, to serve military operations, then'—he shrugged his shoulders expressively.

The Herr Doktor rose to his feet. 'Yes,' he said, 'I quite see it, and from your point of view you have right—undoubted right!'

'And now, my dear father, I had better take the doctor downstairs. He has to go back to the barge.'

Dr. Rouannès grasped his colleague's hand with both his. 'It has done me great good to see you,' he said heartily. 'And I am sure you will be able to alleviate the slight pain from which I now and again suffer. You will remember all I have told you'—the old man looked up at him with a touch of painful anxiety in his eyes, and, as he heard the door behind the screen swing to behind his daughter—'You will help her to get to Paris?' he muttered. 'It would not be safe for her to remain alone here. There may be fierce fighting our way soon. You have doubtless heard of our New Army?'

The Herr Doktor nodded. How piteous

were these delusions of the conquered! He answered in all sincerity, 'In every possible way, my dear confrère, will I Mademoiselle Rouannès assist, when you no longer there to help her are.'

PART III

I

THE cemetery of what was once Valoise commands the wide valley of the Marne, and, as so often happens in France, it is on the highest ground in the town, at a considerable distance from the parish church.

On the morning of the eighth day of September the Herr Doktor was betaking himself there to attend the funeral of his late colleague and patient, Dr. Rouannès.

During the last three days he had scarcely ever left the house of the dying man. No son could have been more vigilantly, unwearyingly, devoted than had been this German surgeon to the dying Frenchman; but while to her whose vigils he shared time had seemed to drag with leaden feet, to him the hours had gone all too quickly, and every moment spent with the woman he loved had

been fraught with emotions which gained in intensity owing to enforced lack of expression.

No wonder that he grew to care with an intimate, caressing affection for everything in the little homestead that now belonged to Jeanne Rouannès. No wonder that he put far from him, even if he could not always wholly forget it, the fact that now, at this pregnant moment of their joint lives, their two countries were at war. Sometimes, indeed, he did actually forget it, for there was nothing to remind him of the conflict in the still, sunlit little house, hidden in its fragrant garden behind high walls. Even outside those walls, along the quiet, rudely paved streets and stony, steep byways of the town, there came no surge of the fierce, devastating tide of war now sweeping ever nearer and nearer to doomed Paris. Max Keller, one side of his nature absorbed in what had become an all-encompassing vision of coming joy, of heart-hunger satisfied, another side concerned with alleviating the last hours of Jeanne Rouannès' father, scarcely heard the little there was to hear, or saw the little there

was to see. He heard, that is, without hearing, the rumours, now glad, now sad, which flew, even in remote Valoise, from lip to lip. He saw, without seeing, the streets become more solitary and barer of human life, as those first September days passed by, bringing, as they always do in Northern France, a wonder of beautiful autumnal colour. . . .

And now, this morning, as the Herr Doktor trudged up to the cemetery, he was conning over a suitable form of English words in which to tell Jeanne of her father's last wish and injunction—that they two should proceed to Paris without delay. As to what should follow their arrival in Paris he, Max Keller, must wait upon events. In any case, he knew that it would be an easy matter for him to afford the aunt and niece help and protection during the short time that must elapse ere Germany made peace with France.

In one thing, and one thing only, he had been keenly disappointed. Since they, together, had left the death-chamber, Mademoiselle Rouannès had gently and courteously

refused to see him, and he had been made to feel by old Thérèse that his further presence in that house of bitter mourning was superfluous. Reluctantly he had gone off to the Tournebride to find there, as is always the case with an empty inn, an unnatural sense of peace and void. Madame Blanc had the spacious hostelry all to herself, and she spent her time in a restless coming to and fro about her one guest. Of her two young daughters there was now, to his indifferent surprise, no sign at all.

Half an hour ago the Herr Doktor and his hostess had started out together, she bound for the parish church, he for the cemetery. Soon their ways had parted, and it had seemed to the German surgeon that the whole remaining population of Valoise, or at any rate all the old women and all the children too, intended to be present at the funeral of Dr. Rouannès. He noted, with a certain indulgent amusement, that there was an air of subdued festivity about those black-clad feminine mourners, for the French are a gregarious people, and to the women walking in slow-moving groups towards

the church, any excuse for meeting was welcome.

Now he had left them all behind him, and as, breasting the light wind, he strode up the last lap of the stony thoroughfare which led to the cemetery, the practical side of his German mind asked itself, with a kind of impatient wonder, why such a peculiarly unsuitable stretch of high ground should have been chosen.

But there is something very appealing, and very intimate, in the final resting-places of the French dead, and the Herr Doktor, when he at last walked through the gates, and found himself in the strangely situated cemetery of Valoise, looked about him with a good deal of sympathetic interest and curiosity.

To his now brimful-of-sentiment heart there was nothing jarring in the ugly, often even grotesque, mementoes which here surrounded him. In his present mood the stone and marble hands clasped closely together struck him as exquisitely symbolic of the highest type of human love; he was touched by the quaint conceit of a black tablet

bedewed with a widower's white tears, and he gazed with softened eyes at the contorted bead wreaths and crosses inscribed 'A notre père,' 'Mon cher petit enfant,' 'Regrets sincères,' which were among the humbler forms of commemoration.

While walking with reverent footsteps along a narrow pathway his eyes were suddenly arrested by an English inscription. Though cut deep into a now very weather-beaten stone cross, the words had become partly effaced. He soon, however, made out their sense:

On September 29, 1870, there fell, close to Valoise, three brave men, nameless German officers. An Englishwoman, a lover of Germany, has put up this cross to their memory. May they rest in peace.

There came a deep frown over the Herr Doktor's mouth. He turned his back abruptly on the old stone cross, wondering bitterly whether the Englishwoman who had done this kindly act was still alive. If so, what must she now think of the treachery of her decadent fellow-countrymen?

Somewhat ruffled by this untoward incident, he walked on, till he found the deep,

roughly made grave wherein his French colleague was about to be laid.

Above the now open vault rose a miniature stone chapel, and below the lintel of the roof ran in gold letters the words: 'Famille Rouannès.'

Walking slowly forward Max Keller went and stood before the gates, between which rose the pair of trestles placed ready for the coffin.

Four marble tablets were fixed on the left-hand side of the entrance to the chapel, and on each was commemorated a member of the Rouannès family. Jeanne's grandfather, dead forty-five years ago; her grandmother; an uncle who had died in childhood. And then, in blacker, clearer characters, an inscription which touched him nearly:

Dame Emile Rouannès, née Demoiselle Jeanne de Blignière. Mère aimée. Femme adorée.

To the right of the Rouannès monument, a square aperture cut in the cemetery wall commanded a wonderful view, not only of the town of Valoise, but of the spreading plains below. He went there, and leaning

over the low parapet, gazed down at the place where, some hundred feet beneath him, was a little square from which fell away the grey and red roofs which seemed, in their turn, to drop sheer into the valley.

An autumn haze, rising from the river, and from the many other smaller waterways intersecting the woods and lands beyond the river, hung over the countryside. And as his short-sighted eyes tried to pierce the masses of shifting mist which moved over the wide, flat expanse of land below, there suddenly broke on the still air the sound of solemn chanting, and he saw, moving up the long winding street which led from the parish church to the cemetery, the funeral procession of Jeanne Rouannès' father.

2

The procession was headed by a woman whom he knew to be the old priest's plain-featured housekeeper. She bore in her uplifted arms a cross, and, immediately after her, came Monsieur le Curé himself. In his black-and-silver mourning vestments the

parish priest of Valoise looked an imposing, as well as a reverent, figure. Behind him were eight little boys in black cassocks, each of whom in his right hand held a lighted candle, which guttered and spluttered in the wind. Very slowly, and pacing in ordered array, the priest and his attendant acolytes debouched into the little square.

There followed a moment of confusion, and in the centre of a black-robed crowd of elderly women—of women the majority of whom each held a child by the hand—the Herr Doktor suddenly saw something which made him recoil and press further in to that side of the wall which concealed him from the people below.

On a rickety low cart, drawn by a decrepit pony, was a large wooden packing-case on which some well-meaning hand had drawn, in black paint which still gleamed wetly in the sun, a rude cross.

Such was the makeshift coffin of Doctor Rouannês.

The colour flamed up into the Herr Doktor's face. With a shock of shame and, yes, of naïve surprise, he realised how

barbarous, how lamentable, even how grotesque, can be the minor consequences of Glorious War.

Behind the little cart and its untoward burden, Jeanne Rouannès, shrouded in black, and heavily veiled, walked alone, followed at a few paces by the two servants of the dead man. Suddenly the cart stopped, and out of the crowd there came forward eight very old men. Stooping down till their knees almost touched the ground, they lifted the white deal case on to their shoulders, and slowly, pantingly, began the task of bearing it up the stony path which led to the cemetery.

The Herr Doktor, shrinking back, instinctively held his breath; he feared that each dragging moment might bring with it the slipping of the awkward burden from some heaving shoulder, and at last the strain on his nerves became so great that he deliberately turned away, and stared, in wretched suspense, unseeingly before him.

It seemed as if hours instead of minutes passed by ere he heard the muttered exclamations of relief: 'Ça y est!' 'Enfin!' 'Oh,

là, là!' which signified that the eight old men had reached level ground at last.

Then, and not till then, the onlooker left the embrasure in the wall where he had been hidden. But no one glanced his way, or seemed conscious of his alien presence, and with aching heart he gazed his fill at the mournful little procession which was now passing a few yards to his left.

The coffin bearers walked more firmly, their burden now better adjusted to their frail shoulders, and close behind them came Jeanne Rouannès.

She had thrown back her long black veil; her face looked as though it were of wax; alone her blue eyes, gleaming dry and bright, seemed alive.

Very soon the crowd surged up, forming a large semicircle, and the one stranger there fell back, on to the outer rim of it. But, even so, he could still see Jeanne Rouannès quite clearly. And when the rude case which served as her father's coffin had been placed on the trestles standing ready for it, the hard waxen look left her face, a long quivering sigh escaped her lips, and these same poor

lips began to tremble piteously. As the tears welled up in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks, the Herr Doktor's filled in sympathy. . . .

Suddenly their tear-dimmed eyes met, and though he did not know it, and was never to know it, she saw him, this German man, Max Keller, who loved her, as if for the first time—for the agony she was feeling unlocked the key to his heart, and made her see therein.

She blushed—a dusky, painful blush of outraged pride, anger, surprise, and quick self-examination and reproach. But no, she had done nothing to deserve, to bring upon herself, this new, this inconceivably outrageous humiliation! But very soon the deep colour receded, leaving her pale as she had been red, and it was with a composed countenance and downcast eyes that she stepped forward to perform the last of the pious offices the Catholic living perform to the Catholic dead—that of sprinkling holy water on the coffin.

Taking the curiously shaped *bénitier* in her right hand, she raised it slowly in the air, and then, in startled surprise, she paused,

for all at once there rose above the silent crowd, almost entirely composed of old women and little children, a long drawn-out, sibilant scream.

Only one of those now gathered there, in that wind-swept cemetery of Valoise, knew what that sinister sound portended; so well indeed did he know it that instinctively he made a movement as if to throw himself on the ground. But he restrained the impulse. And as Jeanne Rouannès waited uncertainly, the women round her gazed up into the sky from whence came the strange sound. Like her, they were all startled and surprised rather than afraid.

Then came a muffled sound of explosion; an acrid smell floated on the light wind, and the Herr Doktor, glancing round, saw that the missile had struck the further wall of the enclosure.

The priest raised his hand. 'I think it is only a stray shell,' he called out in a loud voice. 'Do not be frightened, my children. Go home quietly, and take to your cellars, in case others follow it.'

There followed a general *sauve-qui-peut.*

Mothers and grandmothers took up their little children, and galloped down the stony way, wailing as they ran. Alone among the women there Jeanne Rouannès remained quietly standing in front of her father's bier. As for the old priest, he moved quickly to the aperture in the wall from whence the country below lay spread out map-wise, and the Herr Doktor followed him.

Both men bent down over the parapet, and then each straightened himself and looked at the other quickly, furtively, to see if what he had seen was indeed there, and no delusion bred of a weary and excited brain.

The Route Nationale, which followed the course of the river at the bottom of the town, was dark with moving masses of artillery, of motor wagons, horses, and men. The long sinuous coil was slow moving, yet there was an air of haste and of disorder about it. With an uneasy sense of surprise and discomfort the Herr Doktor gradually began to realise that they were his own countrymen hastening thus in the wrong direction—away from Paris, instead of towards it.

Even as the two, the Frenchman and the German, looked amazedly down, the dark, thick line halted, broke, and swerved; it was clear that in a few minutes the troops composing it would be over-running all Valoise.

The priest turned to the man standing by his side. 'The Germans have come back,' he said, and there was a note of deep sadness in his voice. 'They are in great force, and I trust, Monsieur, that you will help me to keep order in my poor town.'

'The town has nothing to fear.' The Herr Doktor spoke in a loud voice. His nerves were taut. The other's tone, at once commanding and appealing, irritated him. 'With every consideration will you treated be,' he said stiffly. 'I will myself go and seek out the Commandant.'

The old priest, glancing round, saw that Jeanne Rouannès was practically out of earshot. Approaching yet closer, he said urgently, 'I also trust to you, Monsieur le Médecin, to make a special effort to protect that poor girl, and I appeal to you to tell me now, at once, if she will be safer with you or with me? In any case it is clear

she must go home as soon as possible, and assume there once more her Red Cross uniform. That in itself is a protection.'

The Herr Doktor looked straight into the face of the priest. He saw there fear, horror, and indignation struggling for mastery. Very different had been the attitude, the appearance, of Monsieur le Curé when they had first met on that August day, nearly three weeks ago, when the Uhlans had taken peaceful possession of Valoise! Then there had been no sign of fear on the priest's face, and that though he had absurdly supposed himself to be about to be led out and shot. But now? Now the old Frenchman did look afraid.

As for a moment the Herr Doktor remained silent, the other repeated, with a touch of angry impatience and urgency in his voice—'What is it you advise? What do you believe will be best for the protection of Mademoiselle Rouannès? I beg of you to tell me! There is no time to lose—soon it will be too late for me to do anything, for they will want me again as a hostage.'

'Yes,' said the Herr Doktor reluctantly,

'I fear it is true that you an hostage will have to be. But as—as for Mademoiselle Rouannès, she, I assure you, will be perfectly safe! Of her to ask that she should her Red Cross dress again put on, that could I not on the day of her father's funeral do. Indeed, there is no reason why she again should to the barge go down. The men whom I have been compelled as prisoners to keep down there are nearly well, and she has never my own patient nursed.'

His French was poor and halting, but the old priest understood it well enough to be filled with dismay at such—such an obstinate blindness!

'Is it possible you do not know,' he said in a quick whisper, 'how the Prussians have been behaving since they began to retreat—since there began that great battle three days ago?'

The German surgeon stared at the old French priest. He felt amazed, incredulous, and yet—yet a gleam of doubt filled his soul. 'I have nothing heard!' he exclaimed. 'You forget that I the last few days constantly with Dr. Rouannès have been. Why did you me unknowing leave of what you seem

to think I should have known? Even now I do not what you mean understand. And I must of you request to tell me what it is you believe?'

But even as he asked the question the Herr Doktor's mind had rushed back to many apparently insignificant happenings of the last few days. . . .

All through those days there had arisen an unwonted stir outside the little house where he was engaged in so skilfully tending a dying man. Along the quiet, sunny Rue des Jardins there had been an incessant coming and going of peasant women pouring into Valoise from the surrounding country. He also remembered now that a group of girls, crying bitterly, had come to see Mademoiselle Rouannès, and that old Thérèse had informed him that they belonged, like Mademoiselle herself, to a Sodalité, or religious society, and that they were leaving the town.

But he, Max Keller, had been too absorbed in his dying patient, and in that dying patient's daughter, to give any thought at all to what was going on in Valoise, outside the

house and walled garden where he spent so many hours of each day.

'There has been a great battle,' went on the priest quickly, 'nay, a series of battles, in which your armies have been turned back—back from the very gates of Paris! I regret, Monsieur, to be the one to give what to you must be bad tidings——'

The Herr Doktor shook his head impatiently. He did not believe a word of the old Frenchman's incredible statement. It was possible that some trifling portion of the victorious German hosts had been caught at a disadvantage—not likely to be so, but still possible; and a temporary check would, of course, explain what was now going on down there by the river. .

But what was this the parish priest of Valoise was muttering, almost in his ear, speaking so fast and so low that he, Max Keller, found it hard to follow him?

'And in their retreat—the retreat which is now a rout—I regret to tell you that your countrymen are doing terrible things! They are burning, Monsieur le Médecin, burning and sacking as they go — terrorising our

population. Sometimes they do worse—far worse even than that!' He came nearer to the younger man, and more slowly, more calmly, he said: 'Four days ago, I arranged to send most of the young girls away from Valoise. They had to go walking, poor lambs of the Lord. We sent them through the woods,'—he waved his arm vaguely towards the further side of the cemetery—'where our own soldiers are said to be. It was but a measure of precaution, and one urged on me—I will do him that justice—by the Mayor. He always believed that some of your soldiery would come back this way. I did not agree with him. But I was wrong and he was right, and the God in whom he does not believe will, I feel sure, reward him for having saved so many poor innocents. But, as you will at once comprehend, to get Jeanne Rouannès away was out of the question—I did not even think of it.'

And then the Herr Doktor uttered the first insulting words he had said in France: 'Your Mayor, and you yourself, Monsieur le Curé, judge Germans by Frenchmen.

Believe me, your young countrywomen in no danger are.'

Again there suddenly rose that long drawn-out whistling, portent of destruction and disaster, and this time the Herr Doktor rushing forward, called out loudly, 'Prostrate yourself, Mademoiselle! Prostrate yourself, Monsieur le Curé!'

But neither of the two who heard his shout of warning followed his example, indeed the meaning of his words scarcely penetrated their brains. Again the noisesome missile struck the further wall of the cemetery, and this time a huge fragment of the shell hurled itself backwards, to within a few inches of the head of the rudely-fashioned coffin.

With a startled cry of pain and fear Mademoiselle Rouannès shrank back, and covered her eyes with her hands.

'I can you indeed no moment longer allow to remain!' the Herr Doktor made a leap to where she stood. With an awkward movement he took hold of her arm, and, unresisting, she allowed herself to be hurried along the broad sanded path, and down the steep, stony way into the deserted square.

3

When they had reached the middle of the square, the Herr Doktor slackened his pace and looked about him in some perplexity. He suspected the two shells which had fallen so wide to be French shells, and if that were so, there might soon be sharp fighting in the very streets of Valoise. Anxiously he began asking himself which would be the safest shelter for the girl who now stood, silent and rigid, by his side? Should he take her home to the house in the Haute-Ville or down to the Red Cross barge?

Four streets led out of the square. It was clear that the widest must lead more or less straight down to the river. It was along that wider way that Monsieur le Curé, his sable-and-silver vestments flapping in the wind, was now hurrying. Staring after the strange, solitary figure, the Herr Doktor bethought himself uneasily of the old man's words of warning. It might well be true that Jeanne Rouannès would be safer in her Red Cross uniform—safer, that is, from the discourtesy of rough, stern words. Not for

a moment did Max Keller fear or admit, even in his innermost heart, that his fellow-countrymen could behave ill to the women of conquered France. To his mind such an accusation was as base as it was baseless. But he knew that many apparently harsh rules and regulations had had to be drawn up concerning the conduct of the civilian population. Most fortunately Jeanne Rouannès, in her Red Cross dress, formed part of an International Society, and thus was assured of exceptional respect and courtesy.

And yet as he stood there, debating quickly within himself what it were best to do, he, Max Keller, felt a jealous pang of repugnance at the thought of the young Frenchwoman being brought in contact with—well, with the Prince Egon type of Prussian officer. Deep in his heart he knew only too well how small was the measure of respect that type of German is prepared to pay to any pretty woman with whom a lucky chance brings him in contact. Governed by that secret, reluctant knowledge, the Herr Doktor at last traced out a certain line of conduct for himself—one, too, which he believed it would

be quite easy to carry out. That course was to take Mademoiselle Rouannès back to her own house, after which, having left her safe with old Jacob and Thérèse, he, in his official capacity, would seek out the officer in command of the troops about to occupy Valoise, and obtain a pass for a French Red Cross nurse. With that in his possession, it would surely be easy for them to proceed to Paris in his motor ambulance.

'Which way to your house leads?' he asked quietly.

But even as the words left his lips, there suddenly surged up a loud, confused, and menacing sound. With a strange feeling of fear, strange to Max Keller, for he was a brave man, he realised that it was the curious, sinister clamour caused by the undisciplined tramp of a crowd of hurrying men—a sound differing ominously from that produced by the ordered, measured, rhythmic march of soldiers. . . .

Nearer and nearer came the tramp of thudding, shuffling feet. Jeanne Rouannès moved closer to him, so close that he heard the hoarse, despairing whisper answering

her own unuttered question—'*Ce sont les Prussiens!*'

She was glancing about her this way and that—a wild spasm of dread, that of a trapped creature, in her pale face. But every window in the square had been shuttered, every door locked and barred.

'Shall I go up into the cemetery again?' She spoke in English, her lips hardly moving.

The Herr Doktor looked straight into her face; her eyes were steady, but her lips trembled, and her hands were pressed together. He divined the mingled fear and shame—the shame and fear of being so horribly afraid—which possessed her.

'No, no—with me are you quite safe!'

Ah! If only he could make her, his beloved, understand his own complete understanding of her—if only he could lift her beautiful soul up into the ether where his own had dwelt ever since he had first seen her—then she would know how secure from harm she was in his company, and in that of his fellow-countrymen!

But the time had not yet come when he could say even a millionth part of what was

in his heart, and so with a jolt he came down to this earth-bound little French town of Valoise, and once more he repeated reassuringly, 'With me are you quite safe.' And indeed he believed what he said. He had no fear but that his fellow-countrymen, even if drunk with victory, aye, and perchance with good French wine as well, would respect his uniform, and the presence of the mourning lady by his side.

But even so, as nearer and nearer came the sound of trampling feet, of loud, confused talk, there did come over the Herr Doktor's mind a disagreeable recollection of the old priest's hurried, broken account of the looting and the drinking which were said to have been going on in places near Valoise.

It would be indeed a misfortune were Mademoiselle Rouannès to see the noble German soldier at a disadvantage. And then, while this unspoken fear was still passing through his brain, there suddenly surged up one of the narrower streets leading into the little square a motley crowd of grey-clad men.

Soldiers? Yes, men belonging to the

famous Brandenburg Regiment, but now, to the Herr Doktor's disciplined eyes, presenting a sorry, and indeed, a shocking appearance. Some lacked their helmets, some their coats; a few still had their rifles, but all were dirty and unkempt.

It was not the first time the Herr Doktor had seen soldiers in this guise; so had many of the victorious German troops appeared after the hard-fought battle of Charleroi. And yet? And yet there had been a vast difference between those men and these, though he was not yet able to define where that difference lay.

When those who appeared to be the leaders of the unkempt rabble saw the two figures standing in the sunlit square, their line wavered, and some of them drew back, while the loud talking died down into a surprised silence.

There came quickly forward the burly figure of a non-commissioned officer, one, too, who had almost all of his accoutrement complete.

'Herr Doktor?' he exclaimed eagerly.

'We were told there was a good wine-shop up this way! Can you direct me to it? My men are badly in need of food and rest, and every inn in the lower part of the town has already been taken by assault'—he spoke complainingly; it was clear that he was labouring under a sense of grievance.

'But—but where have you come from?' asked the Herr Doktor in a low voice. He felt bewildered — bewildered and strangely oppressed. 'I don't understand how or why you are here, in Valoise-sur-Marne?'

'And yet it's clear enough!' said the other sharply. 'We were promised good beds, plenty to eat, and above all plenty to drink, once we reached Valoise. We find the town practically deserted—only old women and a few children left in it! As for wine'—he shrugged his shoulders. 'Just now the Mayor was required to produce twenty thousand bottles of wine. Do you know, Herr Doktor, how many he offers to provide?' He waited, and as the Herr Doktor remained silent, he suddenly shouted out, 'Eight hundred bottles! What is that among three thousand men? Of course we excluded the

wine-shops as a source of supply—the wine-shops were already emptied before we managed to hunt out the Mayor. Our officers are furious!'

'The officers will get plenty of good wine at the Tournebride——'

The Herr Doktor knew now wherein lay the difference between the victors of Charleroi, and the men who stood staring stupidly before him. The victors of Charleroi had been sober; these countrymen of his were already more or less drunk.

But what was this the corporal was saying, smiling angrily the while? 'The Tournebride? Nay, those of our comrades who passed that way three weeks ago seem to have been locusts—what they couldn't drink they took away! All they left behind them is poison—rank poison! Cheap blue stuff, and not a single bottle of beer!'

There came a quick stir among the soldiers, and they parted to make way for a tall, fine-looking young officer. But he also looked worn, haggard, and angry. His face cleared somewhat as he came up to his two fellow-countrymen, and softened as his eye

rested on the black-draped, fair-haired figure who now stood, with eyes cast down, and hands loosely clasped together, some way apart from the Red Cross doctor and his companion.

'I was told that I should probably find you up here, Herr Doktor! A woman down by the river directed me. Is it true that you've been in this town a fortnight, and that a number of our fellows stayed here a week and ate and drank up everything—the locusts? Not content with drinking up all the wine, it's clear that they also took all the young women away with them! They had, however, mercy on *you*!' With a smile and a slight gesture towards Jeanne Rouannès, he added a few joking words which made the hot colour rush to the Herr Doktor's face.

'This lady,' he said stiffly, 'is a distinguished Sister of the Red Cross. It is in that capacity that she is now under my protection and care. Her father died but yesterday.'

The other had the grace to look slightly ashamed.

'Yes, yes,' he said hastily. 'I understand that—the woman by the river told me of the funeral. But, Herr Doktor? In your place I should take this Red Cross demoiselle straight back to her hospital, and, unless it is absolutely necessary, do not go down into the lower part of the town. When I said just now that there was no wine left in Valoise, it was merely a figure of speech. Of course, there *is* wine; in fact our weary fellows have got hold of a fair amount but it is not good—it is not the sort that we hoped to find here!'

There were many pressing questions on the Herr Doktor's lips, but he judged it best not to ask them. Instead he only observed: 'I am very desirous to get a pass into Paris for this Sister of Compassion. Her father was my colleague, a doctor, that is, of the Red Cross, and on his bed of death I promised him to try and procure a suitable escort and a pass into Paris for his daughter. So pray inform me, Herr Captain, of the name of our Commandant. Where can I find him?—is he at the Tournebride?'

The other turned, and gazed with a

singular expression at the Herr Doktor. 'You will not be able to get a pass into Paris from any of us just now,' he said slowly. 'No doubt the time will come when you will be able to do so. But we do not yet hold the gates of Paris.' He waited a moment, then asked abruptly, 'Does this Red Cross Sister know our language?'

'No, not one word of it.'

'Then I will tell you,' and even so he lowered his voice, 'that we were within one day's march of Paris when came the order to make a turning movement. Do not ask me why, my dear fellow! I know less than nothing about it—only the bare fact. Ask Von Kluck the reason the next time you meet him! For the last three days we have been fighting—fighting and, well, yes, retreating, by night as well as day. That is why my men are worn out. Yesterday evening we were badly surprised, and as our fellows ran they threw away everything—everything which could impede their flight——'

'Their flight?' repeated the Herr Doktor, in a dazed voice.

'Yes, their flight,' said the other shortly, 'or if you prefer the word, my dear Herr Doktor, their rout! But we shall soon re-form. It is but a temporary check. We must not expect to meet nothing but astounding victories—such victories as have blessed us hitherto—in war. The British, at any rate are *done*—rolled up, put out of action altogether. It is a new French army which circled round from Versailles, commanded, they say, by Maunoury, which upset our calculations.' He added, lowering his voice yet more: 'But we are falling back on prepared positions, beyond the Aisne.'

'Then are the French just behind you—close to Valoise?'

'Not very far off,' said the other drily, 'but not likely to enter the town yet awhile. We have found excellent gun positions up there'—he pointed vaguely beyond the cemetery—'and this place should be easy to defend.'

'But where are our main forces?'

'Some have cut straight across the front of what remains of the contemptible little British army—at least that was the general

disposition when I was last in touch with the Staff. About those corps there is no anxiety, for, as I told you just now, the British are done.'

A gleam of joy shot across the Herr Doktor's now haggard face. And the other hurried on: 'So, too, are the French who fell back with them. But that new, fresh army under Maunoury—that was a colossal surprise! Once it is disposed of, we shall renew our advance on Paris.' He hesitated for a moment, and then the pleasure of finding a listener conquered prudence. 'The Crown Prince did not come up to time. His army was to have joined ours on September 2—Von Kluck was waiting for him. There could be no final attack on Paris without the "Draufgänger." You understand? It was our future War Lord's perquisite——'

The Herr Doktor nodded comprehendingly. Oddly enough, he had never seen the Crown Prince, but from various things he had heard about him he supposed him to be not unlike Prince Egon.

4

After leaving the square, the Herr Doktor and Jeanne Rouannès found every street and every alley barred. And though the uniform of the 'Militär-Arzt' generally opened a way without much difficulty, Max Keller soon realised, with bitter, dumb self-reproach, that he had wasted priceless minutes in asking and in answering futile questions. Perhaps because he had now spent a length of treasure-stored days in a country where time means at once so very much more, and so very much less, than it does in modern Germany, he was no longer in mental touch with the type of human being created by the sinister amalgam of sentimental idealism and military discipline.

To a German officer any waste of time, especially on active service, is abhorrent, and during the half-hour the Herr Doktor and his companion had spent in the square, Valoise had been rapidly divided into districts, and the looting therein, as far as was possible, systematised. Thus as soon as a certain number of marauders had been allowed to

go through into it, further entry to a street was barred; and to the Herr Doktor there was something horribly grotesque in the contrast between the sharp discipline enforced by the patrols who sealed each thoroughfare, and the orgy of thieving and senseless destruction which they were apparently set there to supervise and protect.

It seemed, too, as if Nature herself had become a willing accomplice to the powers of evil, for the bright, delicious sunlight, the delicate breeze already touched to an autumnal sharpness, shone on, and blew about, the pitiful heaps of household plenishings which grew and swelled before each doorway.

In tacit agreement the two fugitives—for such they now felt themselves to be—chose a roundabout way to the Rue des Jardins; and as they hurried along, looking straight before them, averting their eyes from the sights which lay to their right and to their left, the Herr Doktor yet became conscious that here and there a house was being spared outrage. Before one such a number of his fellow-countrymen had squatted down on

the cobble-stones, and were engaged in happily eating and drinking their fill. An old Frenchwoman, with a pitifully eager, servile manner, was waiting on them, bringing out of the villa, of which she was evidently the caretaker, armfuls of red-sealed bottles of wine. And yet, as he passed this house which was being spared outrage, the Herr Doktor quickened his footsteps. Somehow the sight he saw there shocked him more than did that of greater disorder.

Tides of shame, bewilderment, and pain welled up in his sore, burdened heart. Would the girl who now walked, with quick short steps, her head held high, looking always straight before her, ever forget the scenes they were now passing through? There was no fear now in her face, only a look of measureless scorn, disgust, and contempt. And it was he, rather than she, who felt a passion of relief when at last they emerged, through a final patrol, to find the intersecting web of streets composing the highest lap of the Haute Ville still free of soldiery.

The long, sunny Rue des Jardins looked unnaturally as usual, but when the two

walked up through the garden of the Villa Rouannès, they saw that the front door was still locked, and the green wooden shutters of all the windows on the ground floor still barred. Thérèse and Jacob had evidently been stopped, and turned back, on their flight home from the cemetery.

'I think we can get in at the back, through the kitchen,' said Jeanne, breaking silence at last.

She led him round the house, to a door which stood wide open, and through the pleasant, exquisitely clean kitchen, where he had sometimes had occasion to seek old Thérèse while tending the dying Frenchman.

Together they walked through into the empty house, and the Herr Doktor spent the short time she kept him waiting in walking restlessly about the darkened salon, which had become so familiar and so dear.

Each minute seemed an eternity—an eternity filled with suspense and acute, unreasoning fear, for he knew that any moment he might hear the sound of eager, predatory feet tramping up the Rue des Jardins; and he visualised with dreadful clearness the

little fragrant garden filled with a mob of his fellow-countrymen, decent enough men at home no doubt, but here, in their grey uniforms and spiked helmets, transformed into thieves, drunkards, and, he feared, worse.

At last Jeanne Rouannès opened the door. She was clad in the Red Cross uniform and veil-like cap which had now come to look unfamiliar in his eyes, for she had never worn them in her father's presence. She held a large, shabby leathern purse in her hand. 'This is the money—a thousand francs—my father always kept in the house. Will you take care of it for me?' She held it out to him. 'They say that'— she hesitated a moment, then said reluctantly—'they say that the Prussians always look first for the money, and then for the wine.'

He took the purse from her silently, and then, for what seemed to him a long time, though it was not five minutes, she stood in the centre of the square, shadowed sitting-room. A little light filtered through the chinks in the old wooden shutters, and slowly she gazed this way and that, as if desirous of imprinting an image of everything

that was there on her heart and memory. But when they had left the house, and were walking through the garden, even when they reached the door in the wall, she did not once look back.

They met with no adventures on their way to the Grande Place, for they chose a roundabout way, along field paths, and under the glades of the forest trees in what had been one of the loveliest of the smaller royal demesnes of old France. And as they at last came out from behind the Abreuvoir the Herr Doktor saw with silent, intense relief that here, too, everything looked as usual. The great open space before them was as empty of life and movement as he had always known it. There was, however, one rather curious exception; but it was a pleasant exception, for it lent an air of spurious brightness, even of cheerfulness, to the scene. This was that the doors and windows of the large villas which formed the left of the Grande Place of Valoise were now all wide open, and were evidently being prepared for the overflow from the Tournebirde.

Suddenly, however, as the Herr Doktor's eyes wandered down the broad thoroughfare leading straight to the river, he saw that all was not quite as normal in this part of the town as he had at first thought, for all the way down the hill, every window of the humbler houses had been battered in!

An old woman was even now engaged in carefully sweeping up the glass in the roadway in front of her little shop, and gradually he became aware that the shop itself was completely gutted, and that there was a dark yawning hole where the window, filled with toys and sweetmeats, had been.

Once more his heart ached with sick disgust and pain while slowly he and his companion began walking towards the long, low, buildings of the Tournebride.

The beautiful old inn, at any rate, looked exactly as when he had last seen it that morning, though the great gilt gates, which had been closed for over a fortnight, were now wide open. It was clear that the Commandant of the German forces now holding Valoise had fixed his headquarters there, but the Herr Doktor's eyes sought vainly for

the sentries who should have been standing at either side of the open gates. This second occupation of Valoise was indeed unlike the first!

'While I the Herr Commandant interview, you can with Madame Blanc here stay,' he observed suddenly.

As they passed through the gates the Herr Doktor was sorry indeed to see that hundreds of empty and broken bottles were lying under the chestnut trees, on the now wine-stained paving stones. These empty, broken bottles gave an untidy, rakish air to the shady, stately courtyard where the first conquerors of Valoise had spent such peaceful, restful hours.

On they walked, picking their way among the débris. The place seemed deserted.

Puzzled, and feeling at once relieved and uncomfortable, the Herr Doktor stayed his steps for a moment, and the girl at his side did so too. Her eyes filled with tears, a sense of terrible degradation seemed to soil her soul, and, as the moments sped by, her companion was filled with growing apprehension and unease.

Why was the Tournebride thus deserted? Officers, as well as the men who had drunk the wine from the bottles now lying empty and broken about his feet, had been here very lately, for on a wooden table standing in the middle of the courtyard were a dozen or more large glass goblets—one even now half full of white wine—and empty, gold-foiled bottles. There also, on this wooden table, lay the bunch of keys which always dangled at Madame Blanc's ample waist.

Madame Blanc? Yes, if, as now seemed to be the case, the Commandant and his staff were all out in the town, he could leave Mademoiselle Rouannès with her while he went to look for them. In that thought he found a measure of relief. The knowledge that Jeanne Rouannès would have to run the gauntlet of the Prussian officers' eyes had been hateful to him.

But where was Madame Blanc?

Calling out her name, he walked across to the half-open door of the kitchen; and then, suddenly, Jeanne Rouannès, hardened as she had become that day to dreadful sights and sounds, uttered a low exclamation

of fear and surprise. 'Great God!' she exclaimed in French, 'what is that? What is that, down there?'

The Herr Doktor peered towards the place where she was staring, and with eyes which gradually filled with pain and horror, he saw that a thin stream of blood was oozing sluggishly through the doorway where he had stood so often talking to the Frenchwoman, with whom, at last, he had become good friends.

He stumbled forward, full of a dreadful foreboding, and tried to push back the door. But it would only swing forward.

Waving the girl back with a sharp, quick gesture, he pressed through the aperture, and then he, too, uttered an exclamation, a hoarse guttural cry of distress, for just behind the door, huddled up on the floor of her kitchen, lay the dead body of Madame Blanc.

The landlady of the Tournebride had been shot half a dozen times, at close range, in the breast, not struck—as the German surgeon for a brief moment had supposed and hoped—by a stray fragment of shell.

'Ach!' he muttered under his teeth, 'this is bad — very bad!' But Jeanne Rouannès, now standing just behind him, remained silent. She looked as if the tears had frozen on her face, and of the two she was the more composed, as, in silence, they dragged the dead woman a little further into the kitchen, and tried to arrange her poor, fat body into some semblance of decent death.

At last, having done the little they could, they came out again into the sunshine, and crossed once more the courtyard of the ownerless Tournebride. And still, of the two, it was the man who looked, and perchance felt, the more affected. In his companion all sensation seemed dulled, and as they walked along, perforce traversing many painful scenes—for they had now re-entered the zone of looting and disorder—she seemed really unconscious of what was going on about her.

Not till they had wandered for a long way, hither and thither, did they find the headquarters of the Commandant established in the Mairie. It was there that

the Herr Doktor listened, with a rush of impotent anger, to the curt intimation that the French Red Cross nurse, instead of receiving a pass out of Valoise, must proceed at once to the German Field Ambulance which was already at work in the church hard by.

PART IV

I

STILL draped in the black-and-silver trappings laboriously hung by the women of Valoise to do funeral honour to Dr. Rouannès, the parish church, when Jeanne Rouannès entered it, was already transformed into a hospital ward; and, as she came slowly back to normal conditions of heart and brain, she was amazed to see all that these capable, if rough-looking, German medical orderlies had accomplished.

Not only had every kind of bed already been commandeered from the houses round, but through medieval glass which the Great Revolution had spared, the sun shone on huge cases containing every kind of surgical requisite ready for immediate use.

An operating theatre equipment had been set out in the Lady Chapel, and a wave of colour flooded the French girl's face when

she saw that the trestles on which her father's rude coffin had rested were now serving as the base of the principal operating table. She could not help wondering in her ignorance why all these elaborate preparations had been made, for the only wounded occupant of this strange war-hospital was a two-year-old girl, injured in the head by a fragment of one of the half-dozen shells which had fallen in the town two hours before.

'To the little child attend you,' the Herr Doktor muttered in her ear. 'I will ensure that no disagreeables you befall. The Herr Stabsarzt is a good man—perhaps you have of him heard, my gracious miss; he is the surgeon Octavius Mott of Ems. Very famous and skilful is he.'

Quickly, and yet with much ceremony, he brought her up to the big, shaggy, spectacled German, who greeted her courteously with the words, uttered in a French as good as her own, 'We shall have plenty of work for you presently, Mademoiselle.'

Then, as Max Keller, in a quick, rather anxious undertone, explained that Mademoiselle Rouannès was the just orphaned

daughter of a French Red Cross doctor, the Herr Stabsarzt became perceptibly more cordial. 'She does not look strong enough for the labours which will presently begin. You must watch over the poor bereaved one,' he said kindly; 'she looks a truly refined, gentle being, as well as full of French prettiness and grace. There are plenty of ugly old women in this town whom we shall be able to make useful when the wounded come in.'

The Herr Doktor's face became transformed. He could have knelt and kissed the hand of the great, the skilful, the so understanding and humane Octavius Mott! The Herr Stabsarzt, looking at him from out his shrewd little eyes, saw something in the plain sensitive face that touched him. 'So?' he said to himself, 'there is already an excellent Franco-German alliance established here!'

The soldier looters of Valoise slept heavily that night. Their miserable victims, those among them who had not fled into the surrounding country, crowded back into their

ravished, empty houses, and into those outbuildings and stables which had escaped the notice of the marauders—anywhere to be free of hateful and terrifying presences. They hoped, poor wretches, with that curious hope and faith in the future, which in the French temperament survives all material disasters, and makes recuperation comparatively easy, that with the morning the enemy would hasten away from the sacked town. This, as they all knew, was what had happened elsewhere.

But, with the breaking of the cloudless dawn, came a new terror to the unhappy people, for shells again began dropping into the town, and, for a while at least, panic and confusion reigned, even among the sated German soldiery. The French batteries, hidden away to the right of Valoise, had evidently obtained trustworthy information from within the town, for their attack was carefully directed to the group of villas on the hill where the officers had established themselves, but the church,—the church which now flew the Red Cross flag, and was still the glory of Valoise, was spared.

At last the French guns found another range, that of the German batteries, and as these replied, so strange and so exciting was the artillery duel, that women, and even children, crowded into the streets and, with upturned faces, watched the shells from the even then famous '75, and the heavier German missiles, go hurtling by overhead.

And then very soon, from the plains below and the woods above Valoise, the wounded came pouring in. They were brought in every kind of vehicle, from the luxurious motor ambulances belonging to the German Red Cross, to handcarts drawn by donkeys and by dogs.

At the end of the first hour, Jeanne Rouannès told herself that there was no room for more. But on and on they came, in a terrible, continuous procession, and place still had to be found for them. After the beds had all been filled, the stone floor, hastily covered with stacks of straw, had to serve as resting-place for many more. Very soon, too, all the houses, and the often more comfortable stables and outbuildings of the town, were also full and overfull. . . .

The French Red Cross nurse was ordered to remain in the church, and reluctantly she found herself compelled to admire the energy, the method, the quick, if to her heartless, type of efficient intelligence, the German surgeons there brought to their terrible tasks. In whatever part of the church she happened to be, whatever the duty in which she was engaged, during those hours of horror and strain, when all the miraculous resources of youth—her fine health of body, and finer stoicism of soul—alone brought her through the awful ordeal, the Herr Doktor watched over, and as far as was in his power, helped her to perform her arduous, pitiful works of mercy.

Very soon—so soon that it seemed retrospectively to have been at the end of the first morning—everything a normal surgeon and his dressers require had been used up, and that though, by the forethought of Herr Doktor Max Keller, all the clean, looted linen which had been put safely away for transport to Germany had early been requisitioned by the Field Ambulance.

The German wounded far outnumbered

the French, and at first the fact had filled the French Red Cross nurse with a relief of which she felt ashamed.

Then suddenly she understood the strange disparity! To these keen, clear-thinking German surgeons their own countrymen came first as a matter of course, and the best was naturally reserved for them. They were skilful, and as humane as it was in them to be, to all those whom they attended, but the grey-clad wounded were obviously the most important.

The knowledge that this was so filled Jeanne Rouannès with revolt, and bitter anger. As she half mechanically performed the duties set her, she thought of her own shattered countrymen, lying for the most part outside and unattended; and she was filled with repugnance, even horror, for all these Germans, both the wounded and the whole, who lay and stood about her. As far as was possible, she lavished the small surgical science she possessed, and the measureless pity and tenderness that was hers in ample measure, on the few French wounded who were brought into the church.

Then suddenly a strange thing happened. A dying German, to whom she had just given an injection of camphorated oil, held out his hand, gropingly. She took the rough, blackened hand in hers, and he murmured 'Mutter,' in a voice full of agonised longing and entreaty. From that moment Jeanne Rouannès no longer made, even in her inmost heart, any distinction between the French and German wounded. She tended them as far as was in her power, and in the measure of her strength, with the same kindness and untiring devotion.

In addition to the wounded—the wounded brought in from the scenes of the fierce rear-guard actions now being fought round Valoise—were the injured townspeople, the old women and the little children who became unwitting targets for the bombs, the shells, and even the arrows, which now and again fell from the German aeroplanes circling in the air above.

Occasionally, not often, the French Red Cross nurse would obtain permission to go out into the town to attend on some of them; and perhaps because the thought of

any personal danger was so far from them both, during those strange and terrible days, the Herr Doktor Max Keller and Jeanne Rouannès, when engaged on such outside works of mercy, met with none of the mishaps which befell many of those about them.

Such trifling, even childish, incidents and happenings remained imprinted on her heart! Thus, she was shaken with rage and disgust when shown that the curiously shaped steel arrow which had fatally injured a little child, had fastened to it, not only a miniature German flag, but an absurd message, written in bad French, pinned to the flag.

As to the sights which filled her eyes when she was away from the shadowed church, the one which remained the most vividly present to her, in after days, was the effect produced by a fragment of shell which happened to unseal the top of a hydrant. Just out of reach of a fiercely burning building, the water rose like a colossal fountain, throwing exquisite sprays of prismatic colour into the sunny air.

All through those four September days, while friend and enemy destroyed the Haute

Ville of Valoise, the sun shone hotly in a clear sky, the air was filled with a soft, luminous haze which rose from the river, and the fierce fighting in the woods behind the town went on in glades and coverts filled with the magic beauty of early autumn scents and tints.

2

Jeanne Rouannès suddenly awoke from what had been a seven hours' deep, death-like sleep. Awoke? Ah no! As she sat up in a darkness broken by tiny, wraithlike shafts of sunlight, she half smiled, half frowned at the strangeness of the nightmare in the mazes of which she found herself involved.

Instead of being in her blue-and-white room at home, surrounded by all her girlish treasures, and lying in the old-fashioned mahogany bed, opposite which hung a charming portrait, painted some thirty years ago, of her gentle, dead mother, she seemed to be—of all the most absurdly improbable places—in the sacristy of the parish church,

and sitting up, fully dressed, on a heap of dirty grey coats!

There came over her a sudden misgiving—a mysterious sinking of the heart. Perhaps this was the beginning of illness—of a very serious, terrible illness? She was conscious of agonising, shooting pain in her head, and over her eyes, also of dull, aching sensations in her limbs, especially in her arms. . . . But if only she could shake herself free of this evil nightmare, she would not mind the pain. . . .

Then there seemed to steal into her delicate nostrils a most horrible odour—And it was that now dreadfully familiar smell, that sweetish, sickly, penetrating smell, which brought back full consciousness to Jeanne Rouannès.

This was no dream—no nightmare. She was in very truth lying, or rather now sitting up, in the sacristy of the old church! It was there that the Herr Doktor had arranged her rude couch the night before; he, too, who had folded one of her blood-stained Red Cross overalls to make a pillow for her head, and, finally, with the thoughtful kindness on which she had grown unconsciously to rely,

darkened the two narrow windows with various holy vestments which he had unceremoniously pulled out of M. le Curé's cupboard. She even remembered, now, the form of English words in which, with a queer break in his tired, worn voice, he had *ordered* her to lie down and sleep.

He had done it all for the best—she knew that. And yet, and yet she was faintly resentful of his well-meant care. For now she was uneasily conscious that she felt less able than she had felt yesterday to go on with her work—the terrible, urgent, unceasing work which lay just the other side of the oak door leading into the church.

Through that door there now came the loud sounds of knocking which had evidently awakened her. Each knock reverberated horribly in her brain.

The Herr Doktor would be sorry—concern would fill his anxious, red-rimmed eyes, when he saw how tired, how dreadfully tired, in spite of her long night's rest, poor Jeanne now was!

Fumbling in her pocket, she found a little box he had given her two days ago, when

she had confessed to a spasm of the headache which was now again full on her, making her feel blind and sick. She had not believed that one of the tiny white capsules in this little box would do her any good—but she had taken it to please him, to show courtesy to one who was always so kind and courteous to her, and who had been so good, so more than good, to her dear father. And then a miracle had happened! Not only had her headache gone, but also her sense of utter weariness and confusion of mind. 'Not more than every four hours must you one take,' he had explained, and she had tried not to exceed the allowance. She had lived and worked on those capsules ever since. But it was eight hours since she had had the last.

Nothing on the part of those whom she still in her heart called 'the Prussians'—a name dating from her childhood—could now surprise Jeanne Rouannès. She was equally ready for their hearty kindness or their equally strong and heartless brutality. During those last three days she had seen much of both.

And yet she was surprised—surprised and, yes, terribly moved—when, on opening the sacristy door, she saw what was going on in the church. All that had been brought there, unpacked and arranged with so much science and care five days ago, was now being prepared for removal. The Sanitäts-Aerzte were busily engaged in supervising the work, and the old Frenchwomen who had been impressed to help in the improvised Feld-Lazaret were assisting the German orderlies with what looked unnecessarily cheerful zeal.

It was a painful scene, a scene of noise, of confusion, and of the angry, hoarse shouting of orders. Lying in the beds arranged in rows on either side of the aisles, stretched out on the now sodden, dirty straw which had been brought in when the beds had given out, the wounded, and, in many cases, the dying, men lay staring with glazed, apathetic eyes at all that was going on about them.

Suddenly an order rang out, in a voice with which Jeanne Rouannès had only kindly, almost pleasant, associations—that of the Herr Stabsarzt.

At once, wheeling about with sharp

precision, each of the German orderlies ceased whatever work he was engaged on, and with firm, ungentle hands began rolling up in their bed-coverings those among the wounded—French as well as German—who were regarded as 'hopeful cases.' The moans, the sudden cries of pain and fear of the wretched men rang out, and the Red Cross nurse rushed impulsively forward, words of protest on her lips.

'You will have enough to do caring for those we are compelled to leave behind us,' said the Herr Stabsarzt Octavius Mott dryly, and then, as he looked into her young, grieving face, his voice softened. 'I know my poor fellows will have care and goodness from you, my dear demoiselle.'

But even now Jeanne Rouannès did not understand, and it fell to her old friend, the Herr Doktor Max Keller, to tell her the truth. She attributed his strange, agitated manner, the look of dreadful suffering on his plain, pallid face, to the nature of that truth, for 'The French will soon in this town be,' he muttered hurriedly. 'Therefore must we go this morning in retreat. That is why I

am compelled you to leave. But I have obtained permission to bring your Curé here. I can with that good old man safely leave you.'

The Germans evacuating Valoise? She knew now why the women round her were working so well and briskly, why there were even furtive smiles on some of their weary faces. The Prussians were being driven away—the victorious French would soon be here!

But Jeanne Rouannès was too tired, too bewildered, to feel more than dully glad.

A few moments later Max Keller obtained from the Herr Stabsarzt unwilling permission to leave the church. 'You must find the priest as soon as you can,' said the old German gruffly, 'for we have to be off in about an hour. Mademoiselle Rouannès will be quite safe here—with the wounded.' But as he shot a look into the younger man's set, unhappy face, he said to himself, 'You'd like to take her along with you, my poor fellow. So? But this is no time for love nonsense!'

3

The Mairie of Valoise was close to the church, and had, so far, escaped bombardment. It was a shabby-looking, modern house, in a narrow street now filled with military motors and transport wagons. And now, both within and without the Mairie, were all the signs of rather hurried, ignominious departure.

Unchallenged the Herr Doktor walked into a dirty hall full of huge packing-cases and crates ready for removal. To the left, above a large half-open door, were inscribed the words 'Salle des Mariages,' and pulling open the door, he walked in.

At an ornate table covered with maps and papers, below an allegorical painting of Hymen, an intelligence officer sat writing. He looked hot, tired and flurried. Raising his head, he frowned disagreeably. 'What is the matter now, Herr Doktor? I sent all the necessary orders to the Field Ambulance three hours ago!' he exclaimed. 'I regret to tell you that every moment is of value, for Valoise must be entirely evacuated by

eight o'clock. We have certain information that the town is to be again bombarded at nine, but this time the French will be destroying what will be left here of their own people!'

At that pleasant thought his countenance lightened.

The Herr Doktor walked right up to the table. He was not in a mood to stand any bullying. 'We have to give the parish priest instructions about our wounded,' he said curtly.

'The parish priest? You mean one of the hostages?' The intelligence officer pushed aside a packet of printed forms and sought hastily under it. 'Here is the key of their prison—if indeed it is still standing! To tell you the truth, I have been too busy to concern myself about these two Frenchmen, and it is a good thing for them, Herr Doktor, that you have this business with the Curé! Yes, by all means, bring the priest to the church, and leave him there in charge. As for the Mayor, he can be released later. That Mayor is a truculent fellow!' He smiled a little grimly. 'You

can hand this key to the priest just before you move off.'

The Herr Doktor took the key, and walked quietly to the door. Did the Herr Major mean that, but for his, Max Keller's, accidental intervention, the hostages would have been left to await release by their own countrymen? But that was quite against the usages of civilised warfare!

After he had left the Rue de la Mairie and entered the zone of destruction caused by the bombardment of the last few days, the Herr Doktor had to pick, to leap, sometimes almost to excavate, his way through the ruins of what had been a pleasant, residential quarter of the happy little town.

What a scene of tragic and, yes, sordid desolation lay all about him, and what an awful stillness—a stillness which made him start at the sounds made by his own footfalls!

All the landmarks with which he had become vaguely familiar during the last three weeks were gone. They seemed obliterated. Heaps of rubble, and decomposing masses of filth, from which he hastily averted

his eyes when warned of their nearness by another of his sensitive senses, rose mountainously round the shattered sides and backs of those houses of which the walls remained standing. Where there had been placid beauty, there was now an ugliness that verged on the diabolic grotesque; where there had been healthy life, there was now foul corruption.

At last, after what seemed an eternity of difficult going, he saw, through a hole blown out in an otherwise still intact wall, a beautiful garden. Beds of blooming, delicately tinted flowers rose amid grass which still looked fresh and green, though here and there, across a stretch of lawn, there yawned a deep pit made by a bursting shell.

He clambered through into the peaceful demesne with a sensation of gasping relief, and wandered on till a turn brought him close to what looked like a massive ruin, out of which, high up above his head, there lurched two large pieces of fine, brass-incrusted, mahogany furniture. With a shock of regret he realised that this was all that now remained of the largest of the villas commanding the

Grande Place, for through an open door, set deep in the wall of the garden, he caught a glimpse of the familiar open space.

He hurried forward, relieved to know that his perilous, disagreeable journey was nearing its end.

And then, as he emerged on to the now deserted Grande Place, the Herr Doktor's feelings of relief changed with terrible suddenness to horror. For the first time he felt his nerve give way, and there swept over him an overmastering desire to rush back and obliterate from his memory the hideous sight on which his eyes now rested.

Bathed in the bright, early morning sunlight, close to him, on his right, the stone-rimmed Abreuvoir was surrounded by a herd of dead and dying horses. There they had galloped, maddened by pain; there they had wandered down, wounded, starving, and thirsty, from the uplands, drawn by some strange, secret instinct as to where water was. Many of the poor creatures still had saddles on their sore backs, and others had attached to them remains of the harness

which had bound them to artillery and transport wagons.

Averting his eyes determinedly from the piteous sight, he ran across the Grande Place towards the screen of chestnut trees behind which lay the Tournebride, and when he reached the high gilt gates, of which the posts were wreathed in now fading orange trumpet flowers, he uttered aloud an exclamation of almost sobbing relief. The long, low, rose-red mass of brick buildings seemed intact, and that though two of the high trees in the courtyard lay split and riven, their blackened trunks broken up into what now looked like monstrous pieces of firewood.

But, alas! as he went on, as he penetrated farther and farther into the courtyard, he saw that all that now remained of the beautiful old inn was the rose-red façade; behind that façade everything had been destroyed by shell or fire. Through the upper windows he could see the sky, and a muslin embroidered curtain, still delicately white, fluttered outwards.

He edged his way to where an arch had given access to the kitchen garden of the

inn. Arch and wall had escaped destruction, but the garden beyond had been rifled of everything; fruit, ripe or unripe, had been plucked; vegetables pulled up from the ground; and the flower borders trampled into a bare wilderness of dust and mud. Two taps had been left running, and a space which had contained a miniature apple orchard had become a swamp. But the square, windowless fruit-house stood unscathed in the midst of the desolation. Yet, as he walked along the dusty path, a nervous sense of misgiving came over the Herr Doktor; he felt he would like to find the building before him empty, and that though it made his journey useless.

Putting the key in the door, he turned it—then recoiled in involuntary disgust, so fetid and so hot was the blast of air which met him. Opening the door widely he walked through into the large room, and saw that his suspicions of the officer who had handed him the key with such ambiguous, sinister words were indeed justified!

Each of the two French hostages lay stretched out on his pallet bed; the Mayor's

body and face were turned to the wall, but the priest lay on his back, and all over his wax-like, yellowing, dead face, and on his white hair, a cloud of flies had settled.

Suddenly the Mayor, with a painful effort, turned and sat up. He feebly dragged his limbs across the brown blanket on which he had been lying, and whispered, 'For the love of God, a little water, Monsieur,' but his swollen tongue could hardly form the words.

The Herr Doktor rushed out into the garden. Yes, there, close by, was running water. But he could see nothing to pour it into. He made a cup of his two hands, and walking this time with slow, steady footsteps, he came back into what had become a charnel-house.

It was after his third journey for water that he heard the Frenchman speak again, in low, husky tones. 'The old man died yesterday morning. He had, it seems, a malady of the heart. But he predicted that I should be saved, and as long as he was alive to say fine and consoling things to me, I kept my courage.'

'You have courage now,' said the German surgeon, feelingly.

'No, Monsieur, my courage has all gone. I am horribly frightened—I am like a child.' He brought out the words with a hoarse, choking effort, and tears forced themselves into his sunken eyes, and lost themselves in his unkempt beard.

To the Herr Doktor, this unexpected incident was proving, rather to his own surprise, almost unendurably painful—and, yes, humiliating. Such accidents should not be allowed to happen in so splendidly organised an army as were the cultured German hosts. He was not a vindictive man, but he longed to bring the officer responsible for—for this bit of callous cruelty, to condign and very sharp punishment.

'Listen,' he said in his odd, twisted French. 'I now go must. But first will I something find in which to leave plenty of water. And, Monsieur le Maire? I have good news for you!' He waited a moment, then went on, with an effort, 'The French will soon in Valoise be, for within an hour shall we leave the town. But before leaving,

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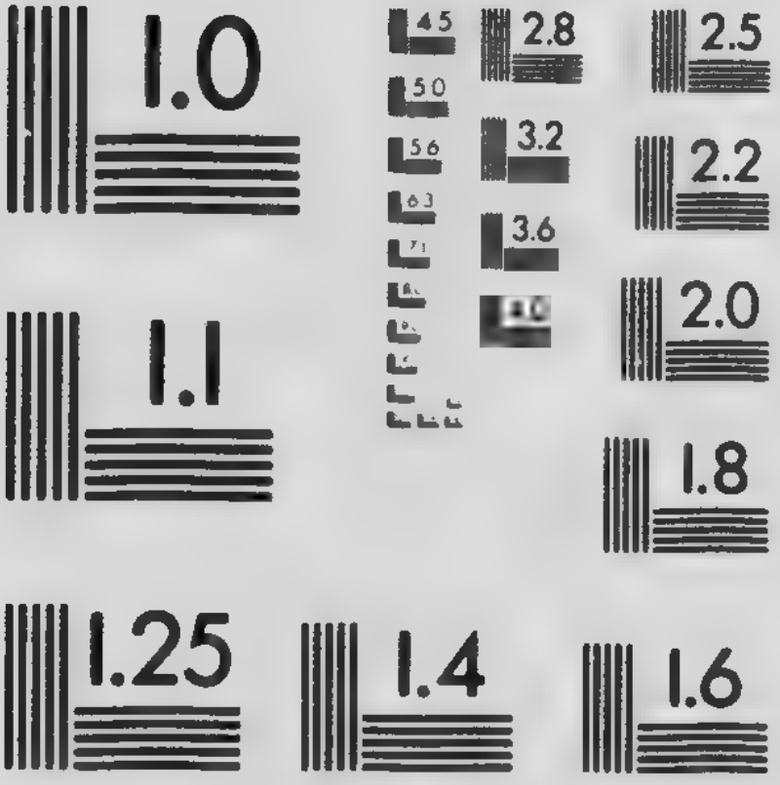

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I will arrange that food suitable to your requirements shall be brought.'

He went out again into the ravaged garden, and, now that the greatest need for it had gone by, he espied a watering-pot close to where he had looked so eagerly a few minutes ago. Filling it up, he hurried back into the fruit-house.

'Do not here a moment longer stay,' he said in a low voice. 'Come out into the air and the sun. If that you do, soon recovered quite you will be.'

PART V

I

THE Herr Stabsarzt was enjoying a steaming cup of hot coffee under the porch of the church which had been his headquarters for five stirring days.

Everything was packed and ready for departure. And the German Red Cross surgeons and their staff were now only waiting for the return of the Herr Doktor Max Keller, and for the parish priest of Valoise.

All final directions had been given to, and intelligently noted down by, Mademoiselle Rouannès. Not that there was much to say or to hear. Patience and pity were all that seemed likely to be needed, for only the dying—those past hope of recovery either as fighters or as prisoners—were being left behind.

Suddenly a shell burst close to the porch under which the Herr Stabsarzt was eating his hasty breakfast. He uttered a quick, sharp exclamation of anger. It would indeed be rough luck if any of his wounded, the men now stretched out in motor ambulances, and in other less comfortable conveyances, were killed while waiting for the start!

'Any harm done?' he shouted, rising to his feet. But half a dozen reassuring voices answered him.

The foremost portion of the melancholy convoy, that is, the motor ambulances, crammed with the wounded men whose condition was considered too serious for the makeshift wagons or springless carts pressed into the Red Cross service, was already under way. Only one large grey motor, that reserved for the Herr Stabsarzt and his own personal assistants, stood waiting in the open space in front of the church. They would be the last Germans to leave Valoise.

As he sat there, under the grey stone porch—for he was a wise man, and as he had a great deal of enforced standing to do he never stood when he could sit—the Herr

Stabsarzt felt more at ease, more 'zufrieden' than he had felt for a long time. A successful medical man—be he physician or surgeon—generally has a kindly, tolerant, understanding outlook on human nature. And this was so with the Herr Stabsarzt Octavius Mott of Ems. But as the minutes went by, and the screaming of the shells grew more insistent, and as they began bursting nearer to the quarter of Valoise they had hitherto spared, he blamed himself for having granted Max Keller's request.

'The poor devils out there, to say nothing of ourselves, will soon be in some danger if this goes on,' he observed to his chief orderly; 'it's time we were——' and then, before he could finish his sentence, there came an awful explosion, followed by the dull thuds of falling masonry, while from close by rose cries and shouts of fear, surprise, and pain.

An Englishman or a Frenchman would have instinctively rushed to see what damage had been done, and especially would he have done so had he been an English or French surgeon. But the Herr Stabsarzt did not

move. He simply shrugged his shoulders. His professional labours in Valoise were at an end. If any civilian inhabitant had been wounded by that shell he, or more probably she, must wait for the French Red Cross.

There was a confused stir of sound—exclamations in French and in German. Someone had evidently been seriously hurt—someone was going to be taken into the church.

But what was this which was being borne along so carefully, and by four of his own orderlies, on one of the stretchers which fitted into his own motor ambulance? The Herr Stabsarzt stood up again, and looked anxiously towards the little procession coming slowly towards him. Presently, with surprise and consternation, he saw that the huddled up figure, of which the head, face, and breast were thickly covered with dust and blood, wore the same uniform as he did himself!

'It's surely the Herr Doktor Max Keller?' exclaimed the man by his side. 'Ach, poor fellow! What a sight!'

'Donnerwetter!' The Herr Stabsarzt was not given to swearing, still this piece of black bad luck was too much for his feelings, the

more so that he knew his own sympathetic, sentimental heart was responsible.

But after he had bent over the mangled, moaning form of his unfortunate colleague, he softened. This, after all, was the fortune of war! If he had drunk his coffee rather more quickly, it might have happened to himself—it might happen yet.

But what was to be done with the Herr Doktor? Plainly the poor man was in no condition to be moved at all, still less to take a long journey. The Herr Stabsarzt made a brief, but still a very thorough, examination, out there in the wind and sunlight, and that examination made up his mind for him. The only thing to do was to leave Max Keller behind, to take his chance of meeting with a humane and skilful French surgeon. It looked as if at the best there was but very, very little that could be done for him.

Turning away with a troubled face, the Herr Stabsarzt pushed his way back into the church; and, as he did so, a feeling of acute nausea, of intense depression, came over him. How awful, how inhuman, above all how *useless*, all this was!

Then he told himself that he had been too long in the fresh air; that was why he suddenly found that subtle, sweetish, devilish, gangrene stench so foul, so trying.

He called out sharply from where he stood — 'Mademoiselle? Mademoiselle Rouannès!'

Leaving the bedside of a dying German over whom she had been bending, the young Red Cross nurse hastened down the nave towards him. Her face was a little flushed, her eyes wet, from the piteous ordeal of trying to ease the last moments of a dying man with whose language she was unacquainted, whose last earnest messages she could never hope to transmit to those he loved. It was an ordeal she had gone through often during the last few days, but to which, as yet, she could not make herself grow callously accustomed; and now she was herself too shaken, too eager to get back to the man she had just left, to notice the disturbed expression of the German surgeon's face. Indeed, the meaning of the words he uttered, as he came up close to her, took some moments to penetrate her brain.

'There has been an accident, Mademoiselle. A shell burst close to the Herr Doktor Max Keller. He has been gravely injured, wounded by large fragments of shell in the face and head, while his right arm has been crushed by a piece of masonry or iron girder. He is not in a state to be moved. We must leave him behind in your care. For his sake, I hope a French Red Cross surgeon will soon be here.' He spoke quickly, pronouncing the name of his colleague in the German way, and to Jeanne Rouannes' ears the name, so uttered, suggested nothing.

'I will do my best to alleviate his pain and to make him comfortable,' she spoke mechanically, and her eyes wandered uncertainly. Where was this newly wounded man?

'I know right well that you will!' The Herr Stabsarzt looked at the French Red Cross nurse curiously. Was it possible that Max Keller's absorption in herself, his plainly-to-be-perceived state of 'Verliebtheit' was ignored by her? Why the poor fellow had been injured, practically killed, in her service! And where, by the way, was the old Curé?

'I ask myself, Mademoiselle, if there is any place other than here where the Herr Doktor could be taken—a place clean, quiet and, yes, airy?'

'The Herr Doktor?' She flushed a little. Then it was one of the German surgeons who had been injured? She had thought the man in question to be one of the orderlies.

'He had a great liking for the barge. More than once he expressed to me the opinion that it was the ideal place for wounded men. Could not room be found there for him?'

And then, at last, Jeanne Rouannès understood. 'Is it—is it *he* who has been hurt?' she asked. And now there was no lack of concern or distress in her voice.

'Yes, it is the Herr Doktor Max Keller—he who was in Valoise before we arrived here,' he answered gravely. 'And the thought of my good colleague dying in this disturbed and noisy place is painful to me.'

'He shall immediately be taken to the barge. I will come and see to everything. There is a small cabin where he will be quite comfortable, and very, very quiet.'

'And I have your promise to tend him till a French surgeon can take charge of him?'

'But certainly,' she answered. He noticed that she spoke a little breathlessly. 'I promise not to leave him till then.'

Again the Herr Stabsarzt looked at her curiously. Did her troubled face express only the natural sympathy of a sensitive, soft-hearted woman—or something more?

'I will myself accompany you to the barge. We will walk behind the stretcher. It is not very far. Do you wish to tell the women here where you will be?'

'No, Monsieur le Médecin,' and this time a wave of colour flooded her face. 'If I do that, they will constantly be sending for me. Everything is in order. There is nothing I could do, that they cannot do.'

She spoke with the decision, the simple ...rectness, which the Herr Stabsarzt admired. W...hat would he not give, in times of peace ...urse he meant, to have such a capable ... woman as this French girl had proved h...self to be, in charge of the nurses in his be...ved clinik!

2

Jeanne Rouannès tended the Herr Doktor all that long, still, cloudless day, as together they had tended so many wounded men during those days and nights which had seemed, to her at least, to contain an eternity of painful effort and strain, of dull despair, of agonising sights.

But here, in this clean, water-lapped little cabin-room, there reigned a delicious quietude, only broken by the drowsy murmur of the river which flowed swiftly just outside, past the wooden walls of the barge. From far off, making the stillness the more intense, came the deep booming of great guns, but with the falling of night that also ceased.

She had been prodigal with the morphia the German surgeon had left with her, and still more with that strange, suggestively-named drug, heroine. For she was dully, but none the less firmly, determined that this man should not suffer as some of the men she had tended during the last few days had suffered. He, at least, had earned

immunity from that hellish pain by all the pain he had spared others.

He lay so rigidly unmoving that had he not sometimes breathed out a long, tired sigh, and now and again, not often, moved his bandaged head an inch to the right or an inch to the left, she might have doubted if he still lived.

At last an immense, limitless lassitude seemed to fall on Jeanne Rouannès. Soul, as well as body, cried out and hungered for rest. Slipping down on to the floor, to the left side of the bed, she propped her head against the hard back of a wooden chair and dozed.

She woke—was it moments or hours later?—to hear a little, stuffless sound—that of the Herr Doktor's hand moving feebly across the sheet.

Turning slightly round, and lifting up her right arm, she clasped the poor, limp, nerveless hand in hers. . . .

How many hands, hard, dirty, tortured hands, she had in pity clasped during the last few weeks!—the honest, valiant hands of

her young, wounded, fellow-countrymen, in those peaceful, early days of war that now seemed to her so unutterably long ago. Lately, the hands she had held in hers, often in a useless, pitiful attempt to make them understand words of kindness or of hope, had been the huge hands of wounded Germans, those big men-children who had seemed to her so much less stoical in the braving of pain than the more highly-strung French soldiers.

The hand she now held was small and delicate, the hand of a surgeon and a student. How kindly that poor hand, now lying limply clasped in hers, had tended her father! At this thought, this recollection, she pressed it more closely, and as she did so, Max Keller, unknowing where he was, though aware of her nearness, came back to semi-consciousness.

Before his sightless eyes there suddenly gleamed the lights of the Schloss at Weimar, reflected in the waters of the Ulm. Then with extraordinary vividness he saw the Schloss gates—those gates which he had passed such myriads of times in his thirty-

four years of life. . . A moment later, he was gazing, with the same sense of vivid reality, at the bronze fountain, let into an old wall, of which the subject—found by Goethe in a church in Spain—is that of two beautiful youths, brothers who died young. One youth, who holds a torch reversed, has his arm round the other's neck. Beneath their feet the clear water has gushed forth since the day when Goethe's eyes first rested on the finished work, and now, lying there in the little cabin-room of a French Red Cross barge, Weimar's dying son seemed to hear the delicious bubbling of the spring.

There, too, he saw the door through which so often walked the one woman whom Goethe had supremely loved.

Thousands of times had the happy Goethe walked through that low door on his way to the beloved. . . .

At last, vaguely, obscurely, there came to the Herr Doktor the knowledge of where he was, and who was with him there. But the knowledge brought confusion, and distress of mind. His associations with this little cabin-room were all of the mother-spoilt, given-

to-base-pleasures princeling, his Highness Prince Egon von Witgenstein. The thought that the Prince might be in Valoise, lying in wait for the young French Red Cross nurse, disturbed him, made him restless. If only he could remember! But it was as if great stretches of his mind and memory were darkened, hopelessly.

'Honoured miss?' he muttered feebly.

And she answered, oh so gently, in a voice he had never heard her use to him, though often these last few days he had heard it whispering kind, consoling, hopeful things to the suffering and the dying: 'Yes, my friend?'

'Where is Prince Egon—my patient who was here?'

'He left for Paris the day my father became so much worse — don't you remember?'

He remembered nothing, but the nurse reassured and comforted him, gave him a sense of spacious leisure in which to think of himself. 'What has to me happened?' he asked. 'Why am I here?'

'You were wounded by a shell, and I

think by the wall of a falling house. We—I and your head surgeon—thought you would be more comfortable here than in the church.'

'And have you the whole time been here?' he asked wonderingly.

'Yes, and I have promised to stay with you till a surgeon comes.'

'You are hülfreicher than any surgeon,' he muttered, in so low a tone that she had to lift herself and bend over him to hear the words she did not understand.

The pale white glimmer of the dawn filtered through the white curtain stretched across the little window, and she saw that there was a change, a pinched grey look, in his face. Tears started to her eyes. Then he was not better, as she had ardently hoped. This return to consciousness, to connected thought, was not the good sign she had ignorantly supposed it to be?

Suddenly he groaned, a spent, weary groan. 'Pardon, honoured miss, it is fatigue which the pain hard makes.'

She gave him morphia. 'Try and sleep my poor friend, and I will do likewise. The morning will soon be here.'

3

There came a series of loud, excited rappings on the door. It burst open, and a little girl—a child to whom in the past, which now seemed æons away, she had been kind—stood breathless, smiling, 'Mamselle! Mamselle! Our soldiers are here! Come and see them. I ran away from mother to tell you! They said you were here.'

Jeanne Rouannès put a finger to her lips. She gave a swift look at the unconscious for ı stretched stiffly out on the narrow bed. If ı nly she could get a surgeon now, at once—

Putting on her cap, she followed the child up the wooden steps leading to the deck of the barge, and even as she did so, she heard the steady, rhythmic sound of marching, broken across by confused, shrill cries of joy and welcome.

Her heart began to beat; she hastened across the sunlit deck of the barge, and ran swiftly down the narrow stone jetty, with the excited little girl clinging to her hand.

'Les voilà! Les voilà!'

And through a mist of tears Jeanne

Rouannès gazed on a sight she will never forget.

They came swinging along, the familiar, active, red-trousered figures looking so slight, so short, so *old-fashioned* after the huge, splendidly-equipped Germans. But though war-worn, shabby as their predecessors had never been shabby even at their worst, these countrymen of hers wore their hot, short blue jackets, their wide poppy-coloured trousers with an air—that most inspiring air of all airs—the air of victory.

How ecstatically happy the sight would have made Jeanne Rouannès a month ago! Now, they simply seemed to her oppressed heart and brain a pageant which brought vague shadowy fears, and a need on her part for thought and action, for which she felt unfit, inadequate.

At last there rode up a regiment of Dragoons. Above their silver helmets—still silver, for these were the early days of war, and the French had not yet learnt the wise and cunning tricks of their enemies—black plumes nodded. Suddenly they were halted, and their commander turned his horse, and

rode up under the trees to the spot where the Red Cross nurse was standing. He lifted his helmet off his head, and showed a young, brave, happy face.

'Madame?' he said courteously. 'Can you tell me when the Germans left Valoise? Have they had time to go far? Did they leave in order or in disorder? Is it true that the upper part of the town is in ruins?'

She answered his questions, and then put one of her own. 'Have you a Red Cross doctor here, M. le Capitaine?'

'Alas! no. The Red Cross attached to my brigade was sent for yesterday. There has been very fierce fighting, Madame—a series of great combats. But my troops are comparatively fresh—they still have to win their laurels.' He looked round, and lowered his voice. 'Have you any German wounded? I hope not. But though they run no real danger'—he had seen a look of—was it fear?—flash into her face—'our soldiers are terribly incensed, for we have come across awful things done by those brutes during the last few days.' His face contracted with reminiscent pain and horror.

'Such sights do not make one feel tender to even a wounded Boche.'

The Red Cross nurse gave him a long sad look. What beautiful, sincere, blue eyes she had—what a firm, finely drawn mouth! He wondered where her husband was fighting.

'I must tell you, mon capitaine, that there are, or perhaps I should say were, a number of dying Germans in the church. All that could be moved "they" took away. But down here, in the barge, I have a very special case——'

She moistened her lips and went desperately on, scarcely aware that he was listening to her with great respect and attention. 'The dying man on the barge is an Englishman, himself a surgeon of the Red Cross, who was wounded by a shell only yesterday. He was untiringly good to our wounded—to all the wounded. It is my great wish M. le Capitaine, that he should have a quiet death.'

'But certainly,' he said eagerly. 'What would not I do—what would we not all do—for any Englishman? I will put two of my own men to guard the approaches to your barge, Madame. As for the wounded in the

church, I will at once go there myself, and see that everything is done for the poor devils.'

They bowed ceremoniously to one another, and 'mon capitaine' allowed himself the pleasure of gazing after the slight, graceful figure of the Red Cross nurse as long as it remained within his arc of vision. That was not long, for Jeanne Rouannès sped away swiftly—fearful of what she would find in the little cabin room. It seemed to her so long since she had left it, and she was nervously afraid lest he might have recovered consciousness, and missed her. 'I am coming,' she called out, breathlessly, in English, and then again as she came close to the door, 'I am here,' she said.

But the Herr Doktor went on staring sightlessly before him. He was busily talking, talking argumentatively, in hoarse, broken whispers to himself, and his fingers picked at the brown blanket.

Sinking down on her knees, she grasped his clammy hands in hers, and laid them to her cheek in a passion of desire to soothe, to comfort, to make easier the struggle she thought lay immediately before him.

Suddenly there floated in the sound of

men's voices singing—a vast, magnificent roaring volume of sound—'Allons, enfants de la Patrie—ie—ie—ie . . .'

There came a gleam across the dying man's face. 'Das ist schon' ('That is beautiful'), he whispered.

'. . . le jour de gloire est arrivé!'

The Herr Doktor murmured 'Das genügt mir!' ('That is enough!') and his head fell back, sinking deep into the soft pillow.

Jeanne Rouannès went on holding his dead hand for a few moments. Then she got up from her knees, and made the sign of the Cross on his damp forehead. As she did so, there burst on her ears the closing lines of the great battle hymn of freedom—

Liberté Liberté, chérie,
Combats avec tes defenseurs!
Sous nos drapeaux que la victoire
Accoure à tes mâles accents!
Que tes ennemis expirants
Voient ton triomphe et notre gloire!

and the terrible, inspiring refrain—

Aux armes, citoyens! formez vos bataillons
Marchons;—qu'ur sang impur
Abreuve nos sillons!

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